MOLDAVIAN FOLK-TALES

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Collected and retold
by *Grigore Botezatu*
Second revised and enlarged edition

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FOREWORD

Moldavia is a country of vine-yards and orchards, the homeland of outlaws and of the legendary heroes Grigore Kotovski and Sergei Lazo, the abode of nostalgic doinas* and lively horas**. Thousands of springs murmur on its expanses, the ancient forests rustle unceasingly, the pensive Nistru bears its waters among rocks, while villages gleam white everywhere, bathed in sunlight, and the vine, called "the strength-giving bush", gathers the sun's rays, the earth's vigour, and the Moldavian's toil in its golden grapes day by day.

This "threshold of Paradise", as Moldavia is poetically called in the delightful old folk song "Mioritsa", has become famous not only for the beauty and bounty of its land, but for the treasures of its spiritual culture.

The heroic-epic songs about Novak and Gruia, Brave George, Codreanu, Corbya, Buzhor, Tobultock and others are an artistic summing-up of life. They show the great deeds of the epic heroes, their ardent hatred of the people's foes, their longing for freedom, their uncompromising struggle against exploitation, and love for their Motherland.

Everybody grows to love the folk stories about Prince Charming and Leonora Golden-Locks, about Hop-o'-my-Thumb and Dragan-the-Bold, about Brave Pepper, and Laurel-the-Monster, the fairy tales about the clever peasant girl, about Pepelea and the greedy landlord, and the humorous tales about Pacala and Tyndala and others.

It is to the folk narrators that we owe the preservation of these fairy tales, to the craftsmanship in their retelling, and to the gift of inventing them. Differing in their repertoire, in their creative character, and in their manner of retelling, these folk narrators are well known all over the country, enjoy enormous esteem, and are listened to with great love.

In the old folk stories the role of the messenger who comes to those retelling the old spells is fulfilled by some supernatural fantastic being. This poetic character is usually a whitebearded old man, who hands over a golden goblet full of honey, and a shepherd's flute to the narrators, and conveys the mystery of the tale's texture to them. There was such a belief that the shepherd, who told beautiful new fairy tales evening after evening for a certain period of time, was rewarded: a magic sheep appeared in his flock, and with it the gift of predicting the future.

The fairy tales themselves were seen in the artistic imagination of the people as changing into fires. In a Moldavian fairy tale published at the end of the XIX-th century, it was said that once in a village three travellers stopped overnight at a house, and each of them told a fairy tale. Later on the fairy tales turned into three fires and protected the house from everything evil. "That is why", the folklorist E. N. Voronka remarked in 1930 (as she had heard from a narrator in the village of Makhala), "it was very well to retell long fairy tales in the evening, because... such fairy tales surrounded the houses three times, and nothing evil could approach them".

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* Elegiac songs typical of Moldavian lyrical folk poetry and music.
** Moldavian choral circle dances.

The retelling of fairy tales has been thoroughly studied, in close connection with the history of the people, and with their development, determined by definite economic and historical conditions. This statement is not intended to demonstrate the protective function of retelling stories, as a means of driving off evil spirits, but to underline the symbolic meaning of those old beliefs, that the fairy tales told during long autumn and winter evenings are seen as protectors of human dwelings, driving away the evil and soaring up into the sky like fires, dissipating the darkness with their light. The protective power of the light comes, of course, from the perennial spring of the moral contained in the fairy tales, from the inspiration of the great deseds, and from the cleverness and the valour of the epic heroes. This is fully shown by the fairy tales gathered in this collection.

The fairy tales represent an important portion of the folklore heritage of the Moldavian people. Their collection and publication began long ago. Many motives from popular epic prose creations were included in old Moldavian literature, and in books on folklore.

The Moldavian fairy tales attracted the attention of Russian and Ukrainian writers such as A. S. Pushkin, A. M. Gorky, M. Kotsubinsky and others. M. Gorky heard from folklore narrators the legend about Danko who tore his heart out of his chest and raised it high like a torch to illuminate the way for his fellows.

Many Moldavian fairy tales have been published in Russian by N. Gerbanovsky and A. I. Yatsmirsky. These publications had a popularizing character.

The Moldavian folklore is rich in fantastic fairy tales, short stories, legends, tales about animals, and in anecdotes. The fairy tales with their bright ideal of justice, of the defeat of all evil forces, of optimism, and of good deeds, are connected with the longing and dreams of the oppressed in the past. The positive characters reach their happy destiny due to their bold and uninterrupted struggle. The wisdom and heroism of a character are appreciated very high and well-portrayed in these works.

The gatherings where fairy-tales were retold were very numerous in the past, and more often than not consisted of evening meetings when the village people sat all together. They constituted the specific repertoire, when people met for collective work. This work, and especially the spinning, was accompanied by jokes, tricks, songs, humorous stories, riddles and, of course, by fairy tales.

Thus everybody is welcomed at the evening parties in the Moldavian villages, where the thread of the fairy tales is spun, and the sweet voice started in remote times is heard up to this day.

The fairy tales, together with doinas, folk ballads, sayings and riddles form the spiritual wealth of the people, are full of admonitions, of lofty ideas and unsuspected beauties, since, after all,

A fairy tale is a fairy tale,
And to tell it I should not fail,
How everything happened and came to be,
As one night in the village they told it to me.

Gr. Botezatu.

BREAK-OF-DAY

nce upon a time there lived an Emperor who had nó children. Then a rumor went round, from mouth to mouth, from ear to ear, that if the Empress walked through the Blue Grey Wood, along an untrodden path early in the morning, where the dew was still untouched, she would have a child. The Empress decided to try whether it were true what she had heard, and really and truly, after some time, she gave birth to a very handsome boy, whom she called Break-of-Day.

Later on the Emperor gave a great christening feast to which all were invited, with rich dishes and music and after, as the custom was, he planted a tree in the garden. The boy grew and the tree grew too. But they did not grow as everybody usually grows. They grew in a gigantic, fantastic way. In a month or two the boy grew so quickly that he was already a fine young fellow and the tree grew from the earth right up into the sky, so high that its top could not be seen.

The Emperor looked at the tree and asked rather puzzled:

"What kind of tree is this? And what kind of fruit will it bear?"

But nobody answered him. Then the Emperor ordered his heralds to announce that anyone who could climb to the top of the tree and bring back some fruit, would receive half of his kingdom in reward.

Many brave youths and princes came to test their courage, but before they had climbed very far up the tree they became dizzy and fell to the ground.

"Father, let me climb up", said his son, the young prince.

"Don't you dare to think about such a thing! Are there no other people ready to die in all my wide kingdom?"

Then the prince began to cry. He cried for a whole week, but the Emperor would not let him try.

Feeling grieved and angry, the boy filled one of his pockets with gold coins and went off to seek his fortune in the wide world. He walked and walked till he came to the edge of a forest and there on a path of green grass near a spring, sitting in a hover and holding a cowry shell, he saw on old witch.

As soon as the old witch saw him, she said:

"Give a poor old woman, a gold coin and I'll tell you some good news. I know that you are unhappy."

"Get out of my sight, before I kill you!" said the prince, who was still very angry. You can't guess my fortune with your cowry shell."

He started to walk on, but the witch stopped him.

"Go back, dear prince! Go back and humbly beg your father to let you climb the tree, because you have set him against you with your hot temper."

The old witch, who had seen and learnt many things in her life, had guessed right.

When Break-of-Day heard her speak about the tree, he came nearer. The witch took a book, because in books brave men's deeds are all written down, and having read a page she said to him:

"Go back to the Emperor, and tell him that you want to climb the tree. Try to make an agreement with him, that if you return safely he must place the Emperor's crown on your head, but if you fall, he must cut your head off. So that he may know how high you have climbed, tell him to give you a big ball of thread, and take the end of it with you as you climb."

Break-of-Day gave a handful of gold coins to the old witch, returned home, and again began to beg the Emperor to let him climb the tree.

"No, no! said the Emperor. Don't you dare to think of it!"

Then the prince humbly begged:

"Let us agree like this: if I bring the fruit from the tree, you will place the Emperor's crown on my head, but if I fall, you cut off my head."

Then the Emperor called all his advisers and counsellors, and at last they agreed to let him climb.

"Now bring me a ball of one single thread, as big as a cart wheel," said the prince.

"Very well," replied the Emperor.

Then Break-of-Day got ready, went up to the tree, and said to the Emperor:

"As long as the ball of thread keeps unwinding, it will show I am still climbing up. Bring the band, and let them play all the time."

So the band played while Break-of-Day climbed the tree. He went up and up for twelve whole years. At last one end of the thread was in his hand, and the other on the ground. The tree had three branches at the top, and on each branch there hung a golden apple. While Break-of-Day was looking at the apples he saw a white bird with a golden tail, which flew down from the sky, straight at the apples, and ate one of them. Then it flew round again and ate the second apple. Break-of-Day's heart was almost bursting with anxiety.

What would he do if the brid ate all the apples?

Just when the white bird with the golden tail flew at the third apple, Break-of-Day quickly caught the bird by the tail, and seized the apple. The bird wriggled and struggled and tore itself away. Break-of-Day was left with one apple and one feather in his hand.

"Thank goodness I've got the apple!" he cried. "As for the feather I shall keep it. If I remain alive, I am sure I'll find that brid."

Putting the apple and the feather into his pocket, Break-of-Day began to climb down the tree. Down and down he went for seven whole years.

When he stepped onto the ground at last, he was so tired that he fell fast asleep there for three days and three nights in the imperial orchard. On the fourth day he woke. Around him there were crowds of people. He addressed them with the following words:

"How happy I am to see you again, good people and warriors! You have waited hopefully for me to return and here I am with good news. See, here is the fruit that the tree bears", and he showed them the golden apple.

The Emperor took off his crown and wanted to place it on his son's head.

"Wait, dear father!" said the prince, "until I catch the thief who stole the other apples I shall not accept the crown," and then he told the Emperor all about the white bird with the golden tail.

The Emperor's gladness changed into sadness at once, but he could do nothing, since Break-of-Day had decided to find the white bird. Nobody could stop him. His mind was made up.

Break-of-Day set out and walked over the rainbow, to the starry skies until he came to the land of the Black Arab, who had seen it written in a horoscope that the brave youth Break-of-Day had been born, and that he would cross the border of his empire. Taking the book in his hand the Black Arab began to look through it, and found out that Break-of-Day had been born fourty years ago. Then he put his spy-glass to his eye and looked round the whole world. At last he saw a man sleeping on the border of his country. It was Break-of-Day. He was so tired from his long travels that he had stopped to rest and had fallen into a deep sleep. The thick-lipped Black Arab took the spy-glass from his eye and ran to see who was sleeping on the border of his emire. Coming up to Break-of-Day he woke him up and enquired:

"Who are you?"

"An Emperor's son."

"What's your name?"

"Break-of-Day. And who are you?"

"I am the Black Arab."

"I wish you good health! I haven't heard of you before. Take me to your palace to have a little rest."

"Wait a moment. I must make preparations to receive such a guest."

Break-of-Day felt so strong after sleeping that the earth was burning for seven miles all round him. The Black Arab was afraid that he would turn his empire into ashes.

Off he went, gathered some mountains together, surrounded them with a river and ordered his servants to put an enormous table in the very middle. Then they loaded it with every kind of dishes and delectables, and when all was ready the Black Arab invited Break-of-Day to the feast and began to talk with him.

"What has brought you, brave young man, to these realms?"

"I am looking for a white bird with golden tail."

"But that is not a bird, brave lad, that's a maiden. She is my neighbour. I have tried my whole life to catch a glimpse of her, but I never could."

"Well, let us swear brotherhood, and go together to her palace!"

"Let us take an oath of friendship!"

So they clasped hands and said:

"Let us live as two brothers, and let nobody know about our agreement!" And so the two became sworn brothers.

"Now let us go to the palace of the white bird with the golden tail!" said Break-of-Day.

"It's no problem to get there, but at the border of her empire we'll have to pass a barrier with cast-iron foundations, a wall of steel, and on top — poisoned spears. Nobody in the world yet dared to cross that barrier," said the Black Arab.

Break-of-Day and the Black Arab set out and walked for a long time through deep forests and by wide rivers, and came at last to the barrier topped with poisoned spears. Break-of-Day took a long run against the barrier, and struck it with his chest, but the wall only shook a little bit.

For the second time he rushed at the wall, with all his strength, and all the breath was knocked out of his body, but the wall tumbled down. Through the breach they saw a flower garden as beautiful as the gates of Paradise. But from the strong fragrance of the flowers all living creatures died. Their aroma was full of a magic spell which lulled everybody into a heavy deathly sleep.

Then the thick lipped Black Arab turned back and swallowed seven hills and seven lakes and, coming back to the bewitched flower garden, began to spit forth a layer of earth, and a stream of water, and covered the flower garden so well that not any fragrance was left. Then he turned head over heels and became a raven-black horse with six pairs of wings.

"Break-of-Day, bestride me, and I'll take you to her palace."

Break-of-Day mounted him, he shook out his mane, and flew high up into the clouds.

"What do you see ahead, brave lad?"

"I see the sun."

"That is not the sun, that's the maiden who is so beautiful and shines so bright. Now listen, dear brother, to what I'll tell you. I can't approach her, because there is a curse on me not to do so, and not to see her. Do as I tell you. Go yourself but be careful not to seize her by the hand, otherwise you'll be left with just a glove, nor by foot, or you'll be left holding just a shoe. Seize her boldly by the waist. Only mind you don't touch her cradle, otherwise you'll die at once."

"Very well!" said Break-of-Day and he went off. He walked for some time, till at last he got to the beautiful maiden's palace. He went boldly up to her, and seized her by the waist.

But when he looked at her cradle, he saw that it was seven times more beautiful than she. The prince forgot the Black Arab's words, took the cradle as well and set out again. While he was walking some gems and pieces of gold fell from the cradle. As soon as they touched the ground they turned into flowers, and from each flower there sprang a bell that rang

so loudly that it deafened everybody. They woke the Devil, who soon came and stood in Break-of-Day's way.

"How did you dare to seize that maiden?"

"Why should I not seize her? She has stolen some golden apples from me."

"Well, my brave lad, I shan't give you the maiden until you bring back my horses from my brother, who lives in the nether world. If you bring me the horses I'll give you the maiden, if not don't show yourself here."

Break-of-Day returned to the Black Arab and said to him:

"Dear brother, I've made a mistake, and now things will go badly."

"Just so, for you didn't listen to my advice!"

"What are we to do now?"

"Let us go to bring back the Devil's horses. Get astride me, and let us start."

Break-of-Day mounted him, and they flew across borders of empires and across deserts and uninhabited lands, and one day came to a valley full of silky, feathery grass with plaited fourfold leaves. In the middle of the valley there was a big tree with three trunks. The branches on the two outside trees were green and leafy, but on the middle one they were dry, and without bark.

"Do you see that tree?" asked the Black Arab.

"Yes, I do."

"Then if you see it, tell me why is the middle trunk dry?"

"It dried up because it had no moisture, or may be there was some other reason."

"No, that's not right."

"Then you tell me why."

"And why are the other two trunks green?"

"Because they are healthy, that's why they are green."

"That's not right, either! The two green trunks stand above the place where the horses are and the dry one stands above their manger. Give me some leaves from the tree."

Break-of-Day stretched up and tried to pluck some leaves from the tree, but he couldn't. The hairs from the horses' manes were growing throught them.

"But where then are the horses?"

"They are under the ground. Their stables lie at the end of the roots."

Break-of-Day seized the trunk of a tree and tried to pull it up, but his feet sank into the ground. The Black Arab also pulled but his feet sank in as well.

"Let us pull together, dear brother."

Each of them took hold of one of the green trunks and when they pulled together, they drew out the trees with so much earth and stones round the

roots, that all the land about was full of hills and rocks, and you can see them in Moldavia to this day.

When this was done, Black Arab said to Break-of-Day:

"Now go down, and go without fear. If you hear any horses neighing and kicking, don't be afraid, because they are waiting for somebody to take them out, and they are fretting with impatience. As soon as you come to the bottom, seize the two horses by the mane and pull them out. But by no means touch their bridles or saddles, or a great misfortune will come upon us."

"I shall do as you say, dear brother."

When Break-of-Day got down below he heard some horses neighing and the thunder of stamping hooves. But the brave lad took courage and went further, and there he saw two powerful horses of such indescribable beauty, as nobody had ever seen before. Beside them were their bridles and their saddles. They were decorated so marvellously with pure gold and silver, that the prince was charmed.

"How can I leave such fine bridles and saddles behind?" said Break-of-Day to himself, and began to harness the horses.

Then the gold and the silver ornaments began to shake and ring like bells. The ringing woke up the Tartar, prince of the underworld. When he saw what the brave lad was doing, he seized him by the scruff of the neck at once.

"How did you dare to break into my stable? Why have you uprooted my trees?"

The Tartar got in such a rage that in less time than it takes to fell he swallowed Break-of-Day, and kept him inside for a whole week. At the end of the week he let him out asking:

"Well, how do you feel?"

"Not bad! I am glad, that I am alive!"

"So am I, because now I have someone to give a task to. For years I have been trying to take Ilyana Kosinzyana as my bride, but I have failed up till now. If you bring her to me, I'll present you with the horses, along with the bridles and the saddles, and you'll be free to go out into the wide world again."

Break-of-Day agreed, and came up on the earth, and met the Black Arab.

"Again you haven't taken notice of my words."

"Again, dear brother."

"Well, never mind," said the Black Arab pressing him to his bosom and kissing him glad to see him alive.

"The Tartar has told me not to return to his kingdom without Ilyana Kosinzyana."

"Then mount me and let us set out, as we have a lot of difficulties and troubles ahead."

"I can't, brother Arab, my strength has given out," answered Break-of-Day and began to sob and moan.

When the Black Arab saw that Break-of-Day was so weak he was very grieved. He took his sword, cut a vein in his left arm, and gave Break-of-Day some of his blood to drink.

"How do you feel now?"

"I feel stronger than ever."

"Well, then mount me and let us start."

Break-of-Day bestrode him and rode for a very long time until he came to the border of Ilyana Kosinzyana's realm.

"Brother Break-of-Day, try and step over the border with only one foot."

Break-of-Day stepped over and his foot sank into the ground.

"If there is no support, don't dare to step any further or otherwise all will be lost. Do as I tell you this time, not as you think. Let's make a proper road and then we'll proceed."

The Black Arab went up to the mountains and found some rocks, took up a whole armful, carried them to the border, and together they paved a stone road up to Ilyana Kosinzyana's palace.

"Now you can go. I should like to go with you, but I am under a curse, and may not put my foot in her palace, so you'll have to do everything yourself. Be careful to do as I tell you, and follow my advice or we shall be in trouble again."

"I shall do just as you tell me, dear brother."

"When you cross the border, you'll meet twelve maidens with twelve bands playing, and they'll do their best to entice you to take them with you. Pretend that you haven't seen them and go on further. Near the palace you'll find a silk kerchief fringed with gold all around. You are not to touch it, or the kerchief will start up a storm, and will wake the guard. You go straight into the palace as a brave lad should do, and take Ilyana Kosinzyana by the hand, while she is sleeping. When she wakes she'll go with you wherever you'll tell her. Well, off you go, and do as I've told you."

Break-of-Day went along the stone road, and all of a sudden twelve maidens with twelve bands playing appeared before him.

They all were covered from head to foot in brilliant jewels and diamonds and were more beautiful than anything he had ever seen before. When Break-of-Day saw them he was so deeply impressed that he almost forgot where he was going.

But the brave lad did not lose his head. He went straight on as though he had not seen them. So he did when he saw a beautiful kerchief, all embroidered with gold lying in his path. Still he went forward, entered the palace, and took the sleeping Ilyana Kosinzyana by hand. When she woke up, they immediately went to the banqueting hall. There at the table

they sat feasting and making merry for three months running.

The Black Arab waited and waited for three months on end, but seeing that Break-of-Day did not appear, he gave such a sneeze that the whole earth shook. It was only then that Break-of-Day remembered his blood brother, the Black Arab.

"What's the matter?" asked the company round about.

"My brother the Arab is waiting for me." Then he rose and left the hall, and Ilyana Kosinzyana followed him.

When he arrived the Black Arab began to reprove him.

"You left three months ago, and all this time you have been feasting and making merry and have quite forgotten about me."

"It was a pity to leave such beauty and wealth at once."

The Black Arab raised his hand and turned both the garden and the palace into a golden apple, which Ilyana Kosinzyana placed in her bosom.

Then they set off together, but when Ilyana Kosinzyana heard where they were taking her, she began to weep tears of blood.

"Break-of-Day," she cried, "I am not ready to rot beneath the earth, I want to live still in this beautiful world."

"No, no, you'll have to go where you are asked to. There is no way out of it."

When they came to the Tartar's kingdom, Break-of-Day called:

"Come out, prince of the underworld, I've brought you what you wanted."

The Tartar was filled with joy, took Ilyana Kosinzyana, and gave him the bridled and saddled horses.

Break-of-Day took the horses, mounted one of them and started off. The Tartar locked the beautiful maiden in his castle and began to run around under the earth to gather his friends and relatives, and to prepare for a great wedding feast.

The Arab who knew the beautiful maiden's great longing, put a bridge in the prince's way, and when he wanted to cross it, stopped him.

"Wait, Prince!"

"What's the matter?"

"The horse you are riding is a good one and can cross the bridge, but the other one is bad, and it can't go further."

"Why?"

"Because nobody is riding it."

"Well, who is to ride it then?"

"Ilyana Kosinzyana."

Break-of-Day turned the horses back at once, and seeing that the Tartar was not at home, stole into the castle, took Ilyana Kosinzyana, placed her on the horse, and all three of them set off across the bridge.

They did not ride very far before the Tartar returned home. When he

saw that Ilyana Kosinzyana was missing he set out, mad with rage, on ninety-nine clouds with ninety-nine storms and ninety-nine thunderbolts to hurt Break-of-Day.

The Black Arab, feeling the Tartar was following them, took in such a deep breath that he breathed in the Tartar and all the storms.

The sky immediately cleared, the earth grew quiet, and they all went on in high spirits.

When they came to the border of the white bird's realm, Break-of-Day took the horses by the bridles and went to hand them over to the Devil. Coming up to his courtyard, he began to knock on the gate.

"Come out, Devil, from under the earth, and I'll give you what I have promised."

The Devil came out and gave Break-of-Day the white bird in a cage. He tethered the horses, turned on the spot and went deep into the earth to put on his mail shirt, so as to ride his steeds in great style.

Break-of-Day took the white bird, but when he wanted to start off, he heard a human voice from the cage.

"It's a great shame that such a brave lad as you should go on foot."

Break-of-Day was very sorry that he had handed over the horses, and because of the maiden's words he returned, untied them, mounted, and galloped off with them. But when he reached the border he saw behind him a pillar of fire rising from the ground right up to the sky. The Black Arab understood that it was the Devil, and at once breathed out of his breast the rains and the storms he had inhaled. They put out the fire so well, that no traces of it remained. As soon as the Devil was dead the white bird turned into a very beautiful maiden. The Black Arab raised his hand over the maiden's realm and turned the palace and its gardens into a golden apple, which the beautiful fairy placed in her bosom.

How glad and happy they all four were, mounted on the horses, Break-of-Day with the beautiful fairy and the Black Arab with Ilyana Kosinzyana. They rode and rode quietly on until they came to a fork-road with one road leading to the right, and the other leading to the left.

„I have to go to the left to reach my kingdom", said the Black Arab.

„And I have to go to the right to reach mine", answered Break-of-Day.

"Farewell! We met as brothers and we part as brothers. I wish you good fortune!"

"Farewell, brother! May success attend you! If it were not you, I could have left my flesh somewhere to the ravens, and my bones to the wolves".

"If you should need me, raise a mighty shout and I'll appear at once".

They hugged one another, kissed one another on the cheek, and parted with best wishes, each going his own way.

The Black Arab went to the left, and Ilyana Kosinzyana threw the golden apple to the East, and it turned into a palace of pure gold. Break-

of-Day went to the right. The beautiful fairy threw her apple to the West, and at once a silver castle sprang up. So one ruled over the eastern kingdom and the other over the western. The big tree with its golden apples stood on the border between their kingdoms, and from then on it began to drop golden apples from its branches every year.

After that they celebrated their weddings with wonderful feasts. I was there myself. That's how I know all that happened. Just as I heard it so I have retold it to you.

THE EVENING STAR AND THE MORNING STAR

Long ago there lived a king who had a son. He was so naughty and mischievous that he didn't know what to get up to next. One day he went to the gates of the palace and shot stones from his catapult. Just at that time an old woman was passing by with a pitcher of water. The boy shot a stone straight at the pitcher. The pitcher was smashed, the water poured out, and the old woman turned to the prince and said: "May you wander oll over the earth, and find no peace until you get to the immortal kingdom and even there may you know no peace, no rest".

The boy returned to the palace, and three days later he was so lost in his thoughts that he became very sad, and wanted to go out into the wide world, to find the immortal kingdom. He pondered and brooded for some days, and one morning he asked the king to give him some money, a change of clothes, a sword and a staff, as he was going to leave the paternal palace. Nobody could stop him and the king's son set off.

He walked along one road, then along another one, past one village here and another there, past one town here, and another town there, and at last he came to a hermit's cell. He knocked at the door, and the hermit came out and asked him:

"What are you looking for, my lad?"

"I'm looking for the immortal kingdom."

The hermit was amazed.

"I haven't seen, and I haven't heard of such kingdom."

The boy looked grieved.

"What am I to do now? I can't go back."

Then the hermit advised him:

"Go through this dense dark forest. There you'll meet many wild beasts,

and as you pass them by, greet each one of them. At last you'll come to a palace, in front of which you will find a Dragon lying with his head on the threshold. Greet him too, and he'll be so glad that he'll move his head aside and let you pass in. There you'll be told where to go further."

The King's son did as he had been told. While in the forest he greeted all the wild beasts, all the birds and all the insects he met. At last he came to the palace.

A Dragon lay before the palace with his head on the threshold. The King's son bowed and said:

"Good day, Dragon bold with your scales of gold!"

The Dragon was very glad, moved his head aside and said:

"If you hadn't greeted me, I would have killed you on the spot."

The prince stepped over the threshold and answered:

"If you had attacked me I would have made you into mince meat."

The King's son entered the palace and saw an old man, as old as the world.

"What wind has brought you here, my brave lad?"

"I am looking for the immortal kingdom."

"It is very far away, my fine fellow, very far indeed. Nobody has ever been there and nobody knows the way. But since you have greeted all my creatures, I'll give you this ball of golden thread. That will show you the way. You just follow the ball wherever it rolls."

The prince bade him farewell, threw the ball on the ground, and it began to roll along over hills, over valleys, over plains and over deserts.

As the ball rolled, it left behind a thin gold thread like a spider's web. So the prince walked for a long time, and at last he came to an oak tree where he stopped to rest.

The young lad sat on the ground in the shade of the tree, but it so happened that by chance he sat right on an acorn which had cracked and put out a sprout. The acorn, feeling such a weight, asked:

"Who are you, my fine fellow and where are you going?"

"I am a King's son, and I'm going to the immortal kingdom to live there for ever."

"Well, don't sit on me, because I have just sprouted and I am feeble and weak. You can crush me. Let me grow, and if you like youu can stay here with me until I grow up into a thick strong tree. I shall live till a ripe old age, and when I tumble down at last, and the swallows bathe in my dust, only then your end will come."

The King's son rose, covered the acorn with soil to help it grow, bade it farewell, and went on further.

He walked again for a long time, till he came to a vine overloaded with grapes. The young fellow stopped to have a rest, plucked a bunch of grapes, and began to eat them. After he had finished, the vine asked him:

"Where are you going, my fine young fellow?"

"I am going to the immortal kingdom, where I shall live for ever."

Then the vine said:

"Bury one of my grape-seeds in the ground, so that it will grow and bear grapes. If you like you may stay here, and you'll live until the vine grows so big that the roots will have no place under the earth and the leaves no place under the sun. As long as you are here you can drink wine and eat grapes."

The young lad buried a grape-seed in the ground and said:

"Thank you, vine, and good luck to you! Grow and multiply, but I go further."

"I wish you good health and good luck!"

The King's son went forward. Soon he saw a wounded eagle, and stretched his bow to shoot, but the eagle said:

"Don't shoot, my fine fellow, and don't kill me. Cure and nurse me and I'll be of great help to you. When you get into any trouble you have only to think of me and I'll fly to help you."

The King's son nursed the eagle, dressed its wounds as well as he could, fed it and went on further.

Shortly after that he came to a sea. Walking along the shore, he saw something all shiny and white before him.

"What can that be?" he thought, "What marvel is this?"

He stepped nearer, and what did he see? The waves rolled back and he saw the King of the fishes left lying on the hot sand, basking in the sun. He was twelve paces long and as tall as a man, with silver fins and golden scales. Nobody had ever seen such a wonder before.

The prince went up to him and said:

"Oh, what a tasty feast I shall make of this fish!"

The fish heard him and answered:

"My fine young fellow, if you eat me you won't get one little bit further. It would be better to take me to the deeper water and set me free. Whenever you need me, think of me, and I'll be at your service at once."

The lad looked for a long pole and little by little heaved the king of the fishes along until he got him into deep water.

Then he walked on further and further. He passed kings and their castles, markets and dirty rascals. Then at last he saw a fox which was being chased by some hounds. He was all bitten and out of breath. The prince stretched his bow to shoot, but the fox said:

"My fine young fellow, don't kill me. Save me from the hounds, heal my wounds, and may be some day I shall help you."

The King's son drove the hounds away, took the fox under his protection, and looked after him until he was well again. Then he let him go.

When they parted the fox said:

"Thank you, prince, that you did not let the hounds tear me to pieces. If you are in trouble, think of me and I'll be beside you."

The King's son set out again. The further he went the more the gold ball unravelled, and the smaller it became. He walked and walked until he came to an elm tree with two trunks. Between them was stretched a cobweb. A mosquito was struggling there. When the mosquito saw the King's son, it began to cry:

"My fine young fellow, save me and I'll help you somehow. I know where you are going. You are going to the immortal kingdom, and if you help me, you won't be sorry afterwards."

When the prince heard such words he stopped, took the mosquito from the spider's web, fed it, and let it go.

"Thank you, traveller, for your kindness. When you have any troubles only think of me and I'll fly to help you. Now on you go, and good luck go with you. You haven't got much further to go and you'll come to a palace. When you reach it, go straight to the King and ask him to give you his younger daughter for your bride, because you can't rule over the immortal kingdom, if you are not married."

The King's son went further and as he went the ball of thread became as small as an apple, then as small as a nut, and when it became as small as a pea, the King's son saw a very beautiful palace, with towers, gilded all over. It was without a doubt the most beautiful palace in the world.

The prince went straight up to the palace and knocked at the gate.

The King sent a guard to ask who it was, why he was there, where he came from, and where he was going.

The prince told him everything and answered all his questions.

Then the King himself came to the gate, and the brave lad told him:

"Your Highness, I have come to ask you to let me marry your younger daughter. I should like to sit at the head of the table as bridegroom, and have your daughter by me as my bride. Do you agree to my proposal?"

"Why not? I'll give her to you as your bride, if you can hide so that nobody can find you. Then we shall celebrate the wedding with a feast and you'll live here for ever, because from this gate onwards the immortal kingdom begins."

The poor fellow became very sad because he didn't know how to hide, and nothing could be done. He sat down deep in thought, and suddenly he remembered the eagle. In a twinkling of an eye the eagle was by his side.

"What has grieved you so, my master?"

"Well, you see, I've fallen into such a trouble..." And he began to tell him about the King's order.

"If that's all it is, don't be troubled".

The eagle took the King's son and hid him high up in the sky, behind nine rows of clouds.

The King had three daughters who all looked alike. They had similar faces, similar hair, similar dresses, similar shoes. The King came out of his palace with his sword and his eldest daughter, and told her that if she could not find where the prince was hidden, he would strike off her head. The maiden went into the garden, plucked a basketful of marigolds and went out with her father to seek the prince.

She looked on the earth but did not see him, she looked on the sea and still did not see him. Then she looked up into the sky, and saw him, and said:

"Come out from behind the clouds, I see you."

In a trice the eagle flew down from behind the clouds with the prince.

The King looked at him and said:

"Well, shall I cut off your head now?"

But the maiden stood up for the brave lad:

"Your Majesty, the first failure must be forgiven."

So the King forgave him.

"Only remember, if my middle daughter sees you a second time, I'll cut off your head".

The King went into the palace to bring his middle daughter, while the poor lad sat there not knowing what to do.

While he was sitting and thinking how to find a way out of the trouble, he remembered of the King of the fishes. He only managed to think of him, and the sea was already washing at the walls of the palace, and the king of the fishes was leaping up from the water.

"What trouble have you got into, my master?"

"I am in a great danger."

And he told him how the King had threatened to cut off his head.

"If that's all it is, set your mind at rest. I know some hiding places at the bottom of the sea".

The King of the fishes took the prince in his mouth like a grain of corn, and dived into the depths of the sea.

The King came out with his middle daughter, unsheathed his sword and said:

"Find out where the prince is hidden, otherwise you will lose your life."

The King's daughter went and washed, plucked some marigolds, put them in her basket, and went to seek the prince. She looked for him all over the earth, but did not find him. Then she looked for him in the sky, behind the sun, and behind the moon, but he was not there. At last she looked at the bottom of the sea, and caught sight of him.

The King called to him:

"Come out, young fellow, my daughter has seen you."

The King of the fishes brought him to the shore and when the King saw him, he said:

"This time I must cut off your head."

But the King's middle daughter jumped up and said:

"Forgive him, father, for the second failure. But if he is found for the third time, then cut off his head."

"Very well", said the King. "I forgive you for the second time, but only for my daughter's sake. But if you are found for the third time, then you will tread no more on the green grass."

Now the prince was really in trouble. He was so afraid, that his heart went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat in his breast.

"He'll cut off my head, and that's the end of me. What can I do so as not to be seen by the King's youngest daughter? Who can help me?"

While he was moaning to himself, he remembered the fox, and that very moment the fox stood before him.

"Why are you moaning, my master?"

"Well, listen what has happened..."

"Be calm! Don't moan and give way to sorrow for such a thing. There is no reason to become gloomy. If things have come to that, follow me. I know what to do!"

The fox went ahead and the prince followed him, until they came to the flower garden. There the fox turned round, struck the prince with his tail, and he turned into a beautiful marigold.

The King's youngest daughter washed, went into the flower garden, and plucked just that very marigold, because she liked it best, and put it in her basket.

Then the King came out of the palace with his unsheathed sword, called his younger daughter, and ordered her to look for the prince and find him, otherwise he would cut off her head.

The princess looked on the earth, but he wasn't there. She looked on the sea, but he wasn't there either. Then she looked into the sky, but she didn't see him there. She looked once more into the depths of the earth, the sea and the sky, among the stars and even further still, but he was nowhere to be seen. Then the King said:

"Look better, you are hiding him!"

The princess answered:

"I have looked very thoroughly, but I can't find him anywhere. I can see his shadow, but not him."

The King could do nothing, and cried:

"Come out, my brave lad, from wherever you are, because my daughter hasn't found you."

The prince jumped out from the maiden's basket and said:

"Here I am, your Highness!"

"Very well, my young lad. I see that you are courageous."

The King called his musicians and told the boy to come into the court, and to pick out his youngest daughter. If he chose the right one he could

marry her at once, if not, his head would be cut off.

Just when he thought that all his troubles were over, here came another, still greater than all the others put together. He began to cry, and wept until his eyes were red.

"This is the end. The King will cut off my head this time for sure."

But at that moment he remembered about the mosquito. The moment he thought of it, the mosquito flew up to him.

"What trouble are you in, my master, that you are crying so loudly?"

"What else can a poor fellow do? I thought I had got rid of all my troubles, but now the King is ready to cut my head off. How can I tell one of the King's daughters from another, when they are all so much alike?"

"Don't worry, my master, don't think about it. I can tell them very well, and I can see which of them is the elder and which is the younger, since I grew up with them. When the King takes them out I shall settle on the nose of the youngest one, and then you can choose her".

The King's daughters all came out, with the same eyes, the same faces, of the same height, and wearing the same dresses. It was quite impossible to tell which was which. But the mosquito flew over some bushes, and then settled on the nose of one of the girls. The girl raised her hand to brush it away, but the prince seized her by hand and said:

"This is your youngest daughter, your Highness!"

The King answered:

"You are right, she is really the youngest!"

And that maiden was as fair and beautiful as the rising sun or as the sweet basil when it blossoms.

The King was quite contented and invited the bridegroom into the palace, placed him at the head of the table, and said:

"I give you my youngest daughter, and I give you my whole kingdom. From today on you'll live together with us. You will not know what death is, and you'll live for ever. Go and travel all over your kingdom, but bear in mind that you must not go out of the gate through which you came in, otherwise it will be the worst for you."

The prince went out, and saw golden gardens, the trees with their branches laden down to the earth with fruit, palaces of gold and silver, decorated with precious stones, wells built of marble with silver cups, rivers full of milk and honey, groves with various kinds of singing birds, and lawns with flowers and green grass full of dew like pearls, such as he had never met before.

There were many interesting things to see, but it is impossible to tell about them all, because the wedding feast had begun with much eating and drinking and cries of merriment. How long it lasted I cannot tell since the sun never rises and never sets in that kingdom, but stands at high noon all the time.

After the wedding party the prince lived as if in paradise. One day he went hunting, and when he took his bow and shot an arrow it flew over the palace gates. He saw where the arrow had flown and went to recover it, forgetting about the old King's advice. He unbolted and opened the gates and did not think what would happen to him. But there he saw the shining thread of his gold ball, and he suddenly remembered his home, his father and his mother. He longed to go and see them. He thought for some time, and at last decided to do so.

"I'll leave everything behind, go home to see how my parents are living."

The old King said to him:

"Don't go, my dear fellow, there is no need. Too much time has passed and nobody is alive, neither your parents nor even their grand-children."

But the brave youth did not believe him. He got ready to go. He took his arms, bowed to the King, kissed his wife and off he went.

The King and his younger daughter were left behind in deep sorrow.

The prince set out, following the golden thread. He walked and walked until he came to the vine and found it spread all over the hills, so far that it was impossible to see the end of it, neither one side nor the other. The vine recognized him and said:

"Stop, brave youth, and take a rest."

He answered:

"Your invitation is very kind, but I must hurry to get home!"

He walked on further still, until he came to an old oak tree. The oak tree recognized him as well.

"Stop a little, brave youth, and take a rest in my shade. You did me much good when you passed by. I have grown out of the acorn you covered with soil."

The King's son was surprised and could not believe that so much time has passed. He thanked the oak-tree, and passed on.

He went further still, and came to the palace where he had received the golden ball of thread, and there he found the Dragon who was so old, that he had almost dried up. He greeted him, the Dragon was very glad, moved his head aside and said:

"My dear fellow, I was getting ready to eat you, but I haven't done so because you greeted me."

The prince entered the palace and found the royal owner. So many years had passed since he had seen him, and his beard had grown so much that he used one half of it to cover himself when sleeping, and the other half to lie on. The old man raised his eyelids with his walking stick, looked at the brave youth and said:

"If you return this way, drop in on me by all means."

He said farewell to the old man, and set out for home which was now not so far away. When he came to where the hermit's cell had been, he found a

thick wood, and was afraid that wolves might steal up on him. As for the hermit and his cell, there were no traces of either to be seen.

The King's son became so sad, that he almost decided to turn back. However, he did not stop, but went on further and finally reached his home. He looked one side then another but he saw nothing. He could only guess where the palace of his parents had been from a pile of ruins. In a hollow he saw a little hut. He went there to ask about everything he had seen. In that hut a three-hundred-year-old man lived. He said that he had heard from his forefathers that a King's court had once stood there, and that the King had a son who had gone into the wide world to find life without death, and youth without old age, and to live for ever in the immortal kingdom. After that there had been a plague and everybody had died, the animals and birds as well.

The King's son was deeply grieved, remembered the words of the King of the immortal kingdom, and turned back. When he came to the place where the gate of the King's palace had been he saw a heap of clay. The prince kicked it with his foot in passing, and out came the Death from under it, all dressed in black. He was lean and bony, and carried a scythe on his shoulder. "Well, this is the decisive moment," the prince thought.

"Oh, young fellow, so you have come at last. I have been waiting for you such a long time!"

The brave lad quickly took himself in hand, and started to run back as hard as he could.

When the Death saw him running, he went after him. When he reached the old King's palace, he could run no further. He greeted the Dragon, who was very glad, moved his head to one side, and the brave lad went in. He was so tired that he only just managed to gasp:

"Help me, dear old man, don't leave me in distress, tell me what to do, because the Death is on my track."

The old man gave him a wide woolly girdle, and said:

"Here, give this to the Death and tell him to wear it until threads remain, and only after that to come to you."

When the Death arrived and saw the Dragon he raised his scythe to cut off his head. The Dragon jumped up with his mouth wide open and his tongue red-hot. He belched out fire and hot pitch on him and didn't let him draw near.

"Stop, old toothless Death, why do you hunt people down?"

"That's not business of yours, let me enter the palace."

"You should have greeted me," said the Dragon, "but now go on your way, if you value your life, otherwise you'll get it hot."

Seeing him so furious, the Death withdrew and cried from afar:

"Old man, let the King's son come out, otherwise I shall tear out your beard hair by hair."

Then the King's son came out with the girdle and said:

"Take this girdle, Death, go back and wear it. When you wear it out until there remains nothing but threads, come for me."

Death took the girdle and began to wear it. The King's son went on further and came again to the oak tree. The oak tree called out to him:

"Come, brave lad, and take a rest."

"I can't, because Death is on my track."

"Don't worry about that. Put your hand in the hollow of my trunk and take out from it an iron walking stick."

"I have taken it."

"If Death catches up with you, give him the walking stick, and tell him to use it until it wears down to the handle, and only after that to come for you."

Then the brave lad said farewell to the oak-tree and off he went. He walked and walked over fields without roads and across rivers without fords.

One day Death suddenly turned up before him.

"Stop, my brave lad, your time has come!"

"Well, when my time comes, it will come, but first take this iron walking stick, and when you wear it out so that only the handle remains, then you may come for me!"

Death took the walking stick and went off, having much walking to do in order to wear it out, down to the handle.

When the prince found himself free again, he walked on as if he had wings. While he was walking he came again to the vine. The vine noticed him from afar, and called him to come.

"Stop a little, brave lad, eat some grapes and drink some wine."

"I should very much like to stop, but I can't as my way is long, my paths are winding, and Death is on my heels."

"Don't worry too much. I shall do everything I can to help you."

"Everything will be all right if you only tell me how to stop old man Death. That's the best thing you could do."

"If Death catches up with you, throw him your sword and tell him to wear it until it rusts away, so that nothing remains of it, and then to come for you."

"Thank you for your advice. As soon as I see him I shall throw the sword at his feet."

The prince set off at once, and hurried on as quickly as he could. Still one day he suddenly came face to face with Death.

"Stop, my lad, your end has come at last."

"Well, if you say so, you say so. Here is the last thing I have in this land. I wouldn't part with this sword if I didn't want to live, but still I give it to you to wear until it rusts away, and nothing but dust remains of it, and

only then, if you catch up with me, it will be my end. If you don't look no further for me, because I am going to the immortal kingdom."

The prince threw his sword at Death's feet and went on further. When the sword rusted away and nothing but dust remained, Death went after him, as swiftly as an arrow. The prince reached the palace, opened the gate and the younger daughter came to meet him and took him by hand, but Death, who had managed to come just at that time, took him by one leg.

"Stop, you are mine, where are you going?", said Death.

"No, he's mine!" said the King's daughter.

"Let him go!" cried Death. "He belongs to me!"

Then the King's daughter said:

"If the things have come to this, I shall turn him into a golden apple, I shall throw it up into the air and the one who catches it will have him."

The King's younger daughter turned the prince into a golden apple and threw it up into the air, and it turned into the evening star. The King and his other two daughters came to the gate and, finding out what had happened, turned the youngest daughter into a golden apple too, threw it up into the air and told her to find the prince and to bring him down with her into the courtyard. Death would no longer be able to harm them. The apple flew into the sky and turned into the morning star.

Death seeing all this became very angry, stamped on the shadows of the three and turned the King and his two daughters into stone pillars. From that time on the evening star and the morning star shine in the sky, and at the gates there are stone pillars.

I rode on a porcupine,
And came with this tale of mine.
A rode on a tenpenny nail,
And I have no other tale.

THE TALE OF ALIMAN, THE GREEN KING'S SON

ong ago there lived two Kings who were cousins. One of them had his kingdom in the East, and was named the Green King. The other one had his kingdom in the West, and was named the Red King. Sence the time they were young they had been kings, but had never met, and only rarely had news of each other.

The Green King ruled his realm, and brought up three sons who were very handsome and strong as oaks. Just when he began to get worried about arranging their marriages, and of providing each of them with his own palace, a messenger came with a letter from the Red King, in which he asked the Green King to send one of his sons to inherit his throne, since he himself was old and ill and did not want any stranger to take possession of all that he had gathered during his whole life.

When the Green King received the letter he asked his sons:

"Well, my dear sons, which one of you wants to go to inherit the throne?"

"Father, I shall go," said the eldest son.

"Good luck go with you!" said the King and after he dressed him out in a princely manner, chose him a good horse to ride and sent him on his way.

The eldest son rode through fields and deserts, through forests and over mountains, till he came to a golden bridge. When he saw it he was amazed by such richness.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing to cut out a piece," he thought, "the way is long and it may be of use to me."

He jumped from his horse, and pulling out a piece of the railings, put it into his pocket. He had scarcely done so, when the bridge began to shake and to lean on one side. As if from nowhere, an old man, who was the owner of the bridge appeared.

"Stop, young man!", he called. "Why do you damage the bridge? Not only you, but everybody needs it!"

And that was as far as he got, for the old man seized his horse and drove the prince off to a court yard, where he placed him under lock and key.

Some time passed, first one month, then two without any news of him. Then the middle son said:

"Father, I should like to go to the Red King's court. My elder brother

has probably lost his way somewhere, and perhaps tomorrow or the day after tomorrow he'll come home."

The King gave him his blessing, dressed him in his best and, giving him enough gold for the journey and precious stones as presents, saw him off. But he made the same mistake.

Coming up to the same bridge, he was taken aback at seeing so much gold, and began to break pieces of the railings off and to put them into his pockets. The bridge was immediately weakened, and sank down over the deep ravine. As it did so, its owner, the old man appeared.

"Why do you cause people so much trouble, and damage such an excellent bridge? Instead of breaking it, you should pass over it with thanks."

The prince could go no farther. The old man seized him, and bound him, and drove him off to prison to serve his sentence.

The days went by but still the King had not a word of news from his middle son, and began to become very worried.

"Father, give me your blessing and let me go to the Red King's court," said his youngest son, whose name was Aliman.

"No!", said the King. "Stay at home. I don't want you to get lost in some unknown desert without a trace."

"Let me go, father!" the youngest prince begged. "I shall not only bring you good news from the Red King, but I shall find out where my brothers lost their way."

The Green King at last agreed, and Aliman mounted a horse, like a dragon, took some money and a change of clothes, and set out.

He rode and rode for a long time, and at last came to the golden bridge. When the rider saw such a splendid bridge across the deep ravine, he took off his cap, bowed, and after crossing it said:

"The man who built this bridge did a good deed. How many people might have fallen here, and cursed their fate at the bottom of this ravine, if there were no bridge here!"

Spurring on his horse, he left the bridge far behind, and rode more than a week until he came to a forest where there was a cottage. Round it was such a solid fence, that wind could not even blow through. Aliman stopped at the gate and knocked.

"Who is there, and what are you looking for in these places?" asked an old woman.

"Granny, let me in to take a rest for the night. I am tired out from riding."

"If you are a good man, open the gate and come in, but if you are a bad one, go away and don't come near my cottage, because I have a little dog with iron teeth and steel claws, and he will tear you to pieces if he sees you."

"I am a good man, Granny," answered Aliman.

Then he entered the yard, bowed to the old woman, and the litttle dog began to fawn on him as if he were his master. That showed that he really was a good man.

When the old woman saw the horse she clapped her hands and said:

"Oh, brave lad, it is just lucky that you have arrived. My children have been hungry for three days already, wandering in the forest looking for berries, since I have nothing to feed them with. Give me your horse, and I shall kill it, and provide them with food."

Aliman's forehead wrinkled in a frown.

That old woman was Holy Wednesday, the mistress of foxes, wolves, bears, hedgehogs and many other wild beasts.

The prince decided to do a good deed for Holy Wednesday and her children, and said with a sigh:

"Take it, Granny, take it. As for me I shall go on foot on my journey."

Holy Wednesday fed her children till they were full and treated Aliman with every kindness. When he was about to leave, she took his bag, blessed it and put a magic spell on it.

"Eat from this bag with relish, and as much as you like for seven years, any dish you wish."

When she finished, there appeared written on the bag: "Food for seven years."

Then Aliman set out with a stick in his hand, and walked, and walked over valleys and hills, through forests and fields. When he was hungry he looked into the bag, and whatever he wanted to eat he took out of it and ate.

As he went further and further, he came to a mountainous country, to the land of the Blue-Grey Forest. At the edge of that forest there was a cave, and from it he heard a voice crying:

"Give me a mouthful of water, so that I see the light of the day once more."

Aliman entered the cave and saw an old man, as old as the world, who had no strength to sit up, or even to raise his eyelids.

"How do you do, Grandad?", said the prince.

"Good day to you, traveller! But what kind of man are you, and what are you doing in these lonely places?"

"I am Aliman, the Green King's son, and I want to know the shortest road to get to the Red King's palace."

"I should like to show you the way, but I have no strength. Be so kind and give me a drop of water to wet my mouth, maybe my strength will return, and I'll be able to go out to see the light of the day once more."

Aliman untied the flask from his hip, and gave it to the old man. When he had drunk a little he revived and regained his strength. On the flask where he had held it, there appeared the words: "Drink for seven years."

"Thank you, kind lad, you have helped me to see the light of the sun once more," said the old man and went out, leaning with one hand on a walking stick, and with the other raising his eyelids.

"Do you see that hill to the south? From there one can see a fire far in the distance. Somebody will be near the fire. Whoever it is, go and ask which road leads to the Red King's court."

Aliman set out and walked until he got on the hill. From there he saw a blazing fire.

When he came nearer he saw that it was not a small fire, but a huge bonfire, as if nine cartfuls of wood were burning. A giant was sitting hearby and warming himself.

"How do you do, giant!"

"Welcome, traveller! If you hadn't greeted me, I'd have killed you."

"If you hadn't answered me I'd have gone on my way."

Then the giant rose. He looked like a mountain. When he yawned once, all the birds of the forest got frightened and flew away.

"Are you looking for a fight?"

"No, I am looking for the Red King's palace."

"It's a pity, brave lad, but I don't know myself where it is. I could help you by taking you to my brother. He is older and knows more than I do. Maybe he knows about the Red King's palace, but I have no strength, as I haven't eaten anything, not even a poppy seed, for seven years."

"Here, take this bag, giant, and eat as much as you like, only show me the way."

"Very well, traveller," said the giant, and when he took the bag and began to eat the whole forest was ringing with his chewing.

As if having shaken from himself all weakness and tiredness, he put Aliman on the palm of his right hand, and when he breathed once the lad did not walk but simply flew, carried along by a strong wind which whistled in his ears. When he came to a stop, he found himself on the chest of another giant who was sleeping. The giant awoke and asked him:

"Where have you fallen from, hop-o-my-thumb, right on my chest?"

"I have come from your brother."

"If that is so, tell me, what he is doing, and how he is getting on, because I haven't seen him for ages."

„Your brother hasn't sent me to stop here chatting with you, but on urgent business. I want you to show me the straightest road to the Red King's palace."

"I could not only show you the way, but I could take you there, because I know the road, but I'm afraid I shall not be able to, since I am very weak, because I haven't drunk a single drop of water for seven long years."

"Here, giant, take this flask and quench your burning thirst."

The giant took the flask and when he put it to his mouth, it seemed that the dam of a great river had broken and a torrent of water was streaming into his mouth. And still he went on drinking and drinking.

"Now I feel that my strength is restored," said the giant and taking Aliman he put him on the palm of his right hand,—

Then he put him on his hand
And blew him into the sky,

Up to the clouds in the heavenly land,
With the stars a-flying by.

When Aliman recovered his senses he found himself right on the threshold of a luxurious palace. It was the Red King's palace. What had he to do? He went in and made a low bow and wished the King good health and a long life.

The King was very glad that at last one of his nephews had come. He called together his musicians, courtiers, noblemen and many simple people from his huge kingdom. He gave such a feast as nobody had ever seen before. Then he crowned Aliman King, and he ascended the Red King's throne.

When the feast was over, Aliman began to look around and to find out how things were going at the court and in the kingdom, and to settle affairs and put things to rights.

Once when he was wandering about the palace, he found himself in a suite of rooms all gilded and besilvered, where an indescribably beautiful girl was sleeping. He could not help himself, his heart started beating fast and he went up, kissed her on the lips. The girl was an orphan who had been taken to the court and brought up there as the King's daughter, since he had no children of his own and was glad to adopt her.

After Aliman had put everything in order, he came up to the Red King and said:

"Now I shall go back to see my father, to bid him goodbye, and then I shall return and reign here."

"I wish you a safe journey!" replied the King.

He loaded him down with many presents and saw him off on his journey.

Aliman set out and rode and rode over deserts, passed cities, through the Blue-Grey Forest, and forded streams, until he came at last to the golden bridge. As he trotted over it, on his way home, he suddenly came face to face with his brothers. He was so pleased that his heart bounded.

"Greetings, dear brothers!"

"Where have you appeared from?"

"From the Red King's palace."

The two elder brothers, who pretended friendship, but really disliked each other, were very astonished when they heard about this. They envied Aliman his success, and looked on him with hostility and outright hatred.

"And what about you, where have you been?"

"We have been on the same road."

"You probably lost your way, poor fellows! But never mind. Let's go home and tell father that we have all three been there, and let him send whoever he wishes to inherit the Red King's throne."

The two elder brothers did not like the idea, and began to whisper between themselves:

"Well, shall we let him wind us round his little finger? Shall we be left to look ridiculous? If father finds out that we haven't been there at all, he'll make our lives unbearable. Let's beat him, take his presents and tell father that we two have been there, and that, either one of us he sends will return to the Red King's court."

The elder brothers began to strip the youngest one, took his presents, and beat him so that he almost died.

Then Aliman cried:

"Brothers, don't kill me. Let us come to an agreement that if you let me live I shall go far away from you out into the wide world, since you have no pity on me."

The two brothers agreed. They left poor Aliman more dead than alive, and went off home without any regrets and without any pity for their younger brother.

There is a saying that even an untruth may seem to be true, if one knows how to tell it. When they reached home, the two brothers began to boast and pretend that they had been at the Red King's palace, and their father believed them. He ordered a great feast to be prepared and named the day when he would appoint one of them to return as ruler there.

Poor Aliman was so downcast and depressed that everything looked black to him. Nevertheless, he did not lose his courage. He pulled himself together and went to work as a servant taking the cattle to pasture and sweeping the roads, in the hope that some day injustice would end and good luck would smile on him.

Meanwhile, the beautiful girl at the Red King's palace after receiving Aliman's kiss, gave birth to a son who was so handsome that he looked like a picture. In a day he grew as much as an ordinary baby in a year.

After some time he asked his mother:

"Mother, where is my father, I have never seen him, and you tell me nothing about him."

His mother trembled when she heard such words.

„He'll come, dear son, he'll come soon."

In the dead of night, after her baby had fallen asleep, she went out, and looked with love and yearning towards the east. Then she breathed once, and a golden road with three rows of golden trees on each side appeared stretching straight away to the Green King's palace. The trees full of different kinds of golden fruit, and golden birds were singing in them. Above the clouds she sent an eagle as a messenger with a letter to the Green King saying that his son should return as soon as possible.

The two brothers were very glad, and the Green King decided that the next day the elder of them should go. He mounted his horse early in

the morning and said good-bye to everybody, but when he started to ride on, the golden road reared up and threw him a long way back. He whipped and spurred his horse, but it could not go a single step farther. Obviously that road was spread only for Aliman.

Then the middle son, much taken with the golden road and the golden birds, went to his father and asked his blessing and permission to go.

"Good luck go with you, my dear son!" said the Green King.

But when he set out on the golden road, he had no better luck than his brother had. So he took a round-about way, and at last got to the Red King's palace. But when he reached the palace he was met at the end of the road by the King's daughter and her son:

"Who are you?"

"I am the Green King's son."

"You are telling lies. You are not the son that I know!" said the maiden, and slapped his face.

Full of shame the King's middle son returned home, and along with his brother began to weep so that they trembled all over. They were enraged to think that the golden road was not for them, but obviously for Aliman. Then they struck their foreheads with their hands as they remembered their oath.

"We have made a laughing stock of ourselves, and we have covered ourselves with disgrace. That's the end of us, brother. Now if Aliman appears on the scene and calls down curses on us, we shall be dishonoured for our whole lives."

While they were talking in this way, suddenly Aliman appeared before them with a broadsword in his hand.

"How do you do, brothers! Well, brotherhood is better than hatred, isn't it? You see how you are longing for it now!"

Then he threw the broadsword up into the air, and it fell on the heads of his elder brothers, and, believe it or believe it not, the broadsword split each of the two elder brothers into two equal halves. Each pair of halves turned immediately into two identical persons, with the same face, the same eyes and nose, the same height and figure. But there was one great difference between them. The right halves were white and shining, ready to turn night into day, while the left halves were as black as soot or even blacker.

Aliman took his broadsword and hacked the black halves into hundreds of pieces and scattered them on the earth, so that they should never come together again.

The white and shining halves then became very glad, threw their arms round Aliman and embraced him.

When the Green King saw such a brotherly affection and love between his sons he stroked his grey beard and simply wept from happiness.

Then they all took precious presents, and travelled to the Red King's court to instal Aliman on the Red King's throne.

The golden road met them with all its beauty and golden treasures.

When they arrived there, the Red King gave such a feast and wedding party as nobody had ever seen before, and one wonders if they ever will again.

And that is the end of my story
Of the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
I can't add another letter.
Let anyone try tell better.

SUGUR-MUGUR

Once upon a time there lived a woman, and she had a little son. One spring the woman went with her little boy deep into the Red Forest to gather mushrooms. The woman found many mushrooms first here, then there, and was so glad and carried away, that she lost her son.

The lost boy began to weep bitterly. He wept for a whole day, and then another one, and at last he met an old man:

"Why are you crying, dear boy?"

"I've lost my mother, grandpa!", and the boy explained everything to the old man.

"What is your name?"

"Peter."

The old man took him in his arms and carried him home.

"Old woman," he said to his wife, "I have brought you home a little boy! Go and milk the red goat, and feed him."

"That's fine!" said the old lady. "Now we shall have a son to take care of us in our old age."

The old woman went quickly and milked the goat, boiled the milk and gave it to the boy. When he drank the red goat's milk he grew as big and strong as if he was twenty years old.

"Now I shall take the goats to the pasture," said the boy.

"Dear son, our goats go grazing themselves."

"All the same I shall go with them."

The boy made himself a stout staff, boiled a jug of milk from the red goat, and went off.

"Dear son," said the old man, "if you go with the goats, don't go on the wolf's estate."

"Very well, father, I shan't go there."

But as soon as the lad started off, he wandered right onto the wolf's estate, a field with copper grass, and copper trees.

Having crossed the border, he at once saw the wolf coming towards him mad with rage.

"Ah-ha, master Peter. Now I am going to eat the red goat which has fed you!"

"Master Wolf, if you eat our goat, I shall strip you of your coat."

The Wolf ran straight at the goat, but Peter seized him by a leg, skinned him of his fur, and then let him go.

In the evening the old woman and the old man were waiting for him with supper on the table, and red wine on the window sill. Peter came home with the wolf's skin, went into the hall and threw it over a beam.

The old woman saw it and told her husband.

"Look, our lad has brought us the wolf's skin."

"No, it can't be the wolf's skin. I think he has skinned a badger, perhaps."

Next day the old woman got up early and pulled the wolf's skin down from the beam.

"I told you that the boy had brought us the wolf's skin. He has saved us from the wolf, and now we can go in the copper wood."

"Well, if that is so, we have a brave boy," said the old man, and when the lad went off with the goats again he warned him:

"Go anywhere you like, but don't go on the bear's estate."

"Very well, father, I shan't go there."

Peter drove the goats out on to the fields and copses and came to a silvery meadow, where the grass grew high with lilies-of-the-valley, and nobody mowed it. When his goats went there he at once saw a bear coming towards him, breathing furiously with rage.

"Ah-ha, Master Peter. I shall eat the red goat which has fed you."

"Master bear, if you eat our goat, I shall skin you of your coat!"

The bear paid no attention to the boy's words and ran straight at the goat. Peter seized him by a leg, skinned him of his coat and let him go.

In the evening Peter stretched the skin on his stick, and went home.

After he had milked the goats and had taken his supper, he threw the skin on a beam and went to bed.

The old woman saw the skin, and said to her husband:

"Look, our lad has skinned the bear."

"Wonderful," said the old man, "he is very brave, and won't be afraid even of the Forest Witch."

Next day, when Peter was ready to go with the goats to the grazing field, the old man warned him:

"Don't think of going into the Blue-Grey Forest, my son, because the Forest Witch lives there."

"Very well, father, I shall not go there," said the lad, and he drove the goats in the usual places, but wandered up to some unknown woods, the border of the Blue-Grey Forest. That was the edge of the Forest Witch's estate.

Peter remembered the old man's words, and stopped.

"Oh, I must remember my grandfather's advice, otherwise I may get into trouble," thought Peter, and he was right, because it is better to avoid trouble than to run into it.

While Peter was standing thinking at the edge of the forest he saw a lean old hag, as thin as a lath, and devilish ugly, and when she noticed Peter with his goats at the very edge of her estate she became as black as pitch and mumbled to herself:

"What in hell has brought you here?
Maybe it's my great sins,
Maybe it's your last days,
Maybe it's your great sins,
Maybe it's my last days?"

She thought of sending him over the glass hill so that nobody would ever even remember his name. Then the cunning old witch said to Peter with her deceitful tongue:

"What a handsome lad you are, and you do yourself credit, but you'd be much handsomer and happier if Ilyana Kosinzyana were with you."

When she said those words Peter felt his heart beat very quickly. Next day he went there again. The old witch was waiting at the border and so that he should not come there again with the goats, she said:

"What a handsome lad you are, and do yourself credit, but you'd be handsomer and happier if Ilyana Kosinzyana were with you. When she throws a flower from her plait only a brave man will pick it up. She neither grows younger nor older, but she is always sixteen years old."

Peter arrived home and spoke to the old man and the old woman:

"Listen what an old woman has told me today."

"Oh, my dear son, the one who told you that only wished you harm. That was the Forest Witch. She wants to get rid of you. Where will you go, where will you find Ilyana Kosinzyana? Stay here and get married. We shall find a beautiful and clever girl for you."

The next day Peter did not go with the goats to the pasture, but sat at home sad and gloomy.

One morning he said to the old man and to the old woman:

"I shall go to the end of the world, to the depths of the earth to look for Ilyana Kosinzyana. When she throws a flower from her plait only a brave man will pick it up."

The old man cried, the old woman cried, but at last they had to agree.

Peter set out and walked and walked, and I can't tell you all he saw. While walking he noticed an overturned rock. Under it there was a snake which was moaning and groaning and it was clear that it was in a sorry plight. When the snake saw the traveller it began to speak in a human voice:

"Good fellow, lift this rock from me, help me to get out from here, and you'll be doing a good deed."

Peter lifted up the rock, and the snake got out. When Peter looked he saw something written on the rock:

"If you go to the Black King and get Sugur-Mugur out of prison, he'll help you to make Ilyana Kosinzyana your bride."

Peter went bravely on, until he came to the Black King's palace. There he knocked on the gate and asked:

"Do you need any servants?"

"Yes, indeed we do. We are in great need of them just now."

So he was engaged as a servant, and worked a whole year for one loaf of bread. At the end of the year he was nothing but skin and bones.

When the reckoning day came, Peter went to the King, according to their agreement, and asked for his pay.

"And what do you want from me?" the King asked him.

"I want you to set Sugur-Mugur free from prison."

The King was furious.

"So that is what you have worked a whole year for? For an evildoer and a scoundrel! Go back and work another year."

Peter worked for another year and again came to the King.

"What do you want from me?" asked the Black King.

"Set Sugur-Mugur free."

"I don't even know if he is alive or dead, as he has been imprisoned for twenty years already, with one glass of water and one slice of bread a day. In that time a forest has grown up where he used to walk."

"If he is dead, I should like at least to see his grave."

The Black King ordered his servants to yoke twelve pairs of oxen, and to bring the key of the prison.

Peter was amazed when he heard of such a thing and said:

"Allow me, your Highness! I shall be able to carry the key myself."

The Black King was very scared. Nevertheless, Peter went, took the key, opened the prison himself, and cried:

"Sugur-Mugur, I have come to set you free! Sugur-Mugur, are you still alive?"

Sugur-Mugur answered from the deep, deep dungeon:

"I am still alive, Peter, but if you had come one or two days later you would have found me dead."

"Come out now, Sugur-Mugur."

"I can't move."

Sugur-Mugur was bound with twenty-five chains, and each link weighed twenty five pounds. Peter released him, took him out and said:

"Do you know that I have laboured hard for two years to set you free?"

"I know, but it would have been better if you hadn't. Now, I shall have some difficult roads to travel."

When Sugur-Mugur came out of prison he was very weak on his legs, and as thin as a rake. The years had bowed him down and he looked like a living skeleton.

What do you think Peter did? From his magic bag he prepared a rich feast with tasty dishes, and from the magic flask poured lots of wine. Sugur-Mugur ate and drank for three days on end. After that he went out into the courtyard whooped once so loudly that the mountains shook and the clear waters grew muddy.

Then Sugur-Mugur sat down again at table and said:

"Let us feast for another three days and nights, because I am still weak."

They sat down at table and ate roasted oxen, baked rams and grilled lambs straight from the spit and drank wine from three-gallon wooden buckets. After three days Sugur-Mugur went out into the courtyard and when he whooped once again the ancient mountains came tumbling down, and cliffs sank into the sea.

Again Sugur-Mugur sat down at table, full of food and wine and said:

"I still have no the strength I had once. Let us eat three days more."

When three more days of feasting had passed Sugur-Mugur went out into the courtyard and whooped again. This time the earth heeled over, the moon went slanting, the hills turned into plains, and the forests fell like matchwood.

"Well, Peter, let's get ready for the road now, as my strength is restored."

From there they went to a stone stable dug deep in the earth, and took out two lean horses, so lean that even a breath of wind could knock them down.

"What shall we do with these good-for-nothing horses?" asked Peter.

Sugur-Mugur gave each of them a two-handled tub of red-hot coals. The horses ate them and, when they shook once, the earth trembled underneath them, and they turned into two beautiful strong horses with long manes, decorated bridles and strong hooves, fit to carry their riders up to the sky with them. One of the horses was as black as a raven and Sugur-Mugur named it Black-Devil. The other one was chestnut and he named it Bay-Prince.

"Now, Peter, go to Redoitse the gipsy, who knows how to use a hammer,

and ask him to shoe the horses, but each horseshoe must weigh twenty-five pounds. I'll go and have a sleep until you come back."

Peter went to the blacksmith with the horses, while Sugur-Mugur lay down on the ground, covered himself with the sky, and slept a brave sleep.

Peter took the horses by the bridles, and went up to Redoitse the gipsy.

"How do you do!"

"What do you want, my lad?"

"I have come to have my horses shod".

"Very well, I shall shoe them."

Peter explained that the horses had to be shod with iron horseshoes weighing twenty-five pounds each.

The shoesmith was amazed:

"Only for Surug-Mugur have I shod horses with twenty-five pounds horseshoes."

Peter said to him:

"These are also for Sugur-Mugur."

"If that is so the work will take one year."

Redoitse the gipsy took some pure iron, put aside twenty-five pounds for each horseshoe, forged them, and hammered thick horseshoe nails to hold them tight on the hard stone road.

Peter waited while this was done and then went and woke up Sugur-Mugur. They mounted the horses — Peter on Bay-Prince, and Sugur-Mugur on Black-Devil, and when galloped off the glasses jingled on the Black King's table.

They rode and rode, and long they rode, until they come to a stony hill.

After they crossed the stony hill the horseshoes wore out.

Sugur-Mugur sent Peter to a shoesmith, and told him to get the horses shod with pure steel.

Peter took the horses to a smithy in the forest.

"How do you do, good shoe-smith!"

"How do you do, traveller! What have you come for?"

"I have come to have my horses shod."

"Very well, I shall shoe them."

"How much will you ask?"

"Three purses of gold pieces for each horseshoe."

"I'll give you three purses of gold pieces for each horseshoe, but first I must tell you what kind they must be."

"As you wish."

"You must make them of pure steel, and each one must weigh twenty-five pounds."

"Oh, if I had known that, I would never have agreed. Only for

Sugur-Mugur have I shod horses with twenty-five pounds horseshoes. I have never seen nor heard of a braver and stronger man than he was. If he is alive, let him live long. If he is dead, may the earth lie light on him!"

"He is alive, grandpa, he is alive".

When the blacksmith heard that, he heated the steel horseshoes red-hot, tempered and fitted them, and hammered each horseshoe on with twenty-five nails, so as they would neither fall off, nor wear out on the flint hill.

When the horses had been shod Peter came back to Sugur-Mugur. They mounted and galloped off again until at last they came to the flint hill. There they whipped up the horses, and flew on as quickly as the wind. When the horses struck the flint with their horseshoes, it burnt ninty fathoms deep. But when they had crossed the flint hill, all the horseshoes were worn out, and even half of the hooves.

Sugur-Mugur sent Peter to another shoe-smith and told him to get the horses shod with diamond horseshoes, each one weighing twenty-five pounds.

Peter took the horses, entered the forest and found a smithy. He agreed to pay what the shoe-smith asked, and they shook hands on it. But when the blacksmith found out what kind of horseshoes he wanted, he was amazed and said:

"Why, only for Sugur-Mugur have I shod horses with twenty-five pounds horseshoes, but he was put in a deep dungeon by the Black King, and I don't know if he is alive or dead."

"He is alive, grandpa, he is alive."

When the shoesmith heard that, he took his hammer, and beat on the anvil, and many other blacksmiths came. They were as many as leaves on a tree, and worked as quick as lightning. They all worked together and in a moment the horses were shod.

Again Sugur-Mugur and Peter set out and rode and rode for a very long time, taking a rest here and there.

They rode for a year, may be two, or three, or may be more, nobody knows, but anyway after a very long time they saw a castle in the distance. They had never seen such a castle before. It was surrounded by rainbows, and studded with thousands of stars, that lit it up at night as at midday. It was Ilyana Kosinzyana's castle.

When they came to the foot of the hill they could not believe their eyes. There, a flame came from the earth and rose up to the sky.

Peter asked:

"Why is this fire blazing from the earth up to the sky?"

"This is not fire, it is the flame of Ilyana Kosinzyana's beauty. When she throws a flower from her plait, only a brave man will pick it up. She

neither grows younger nor older, but she is always sixteen. She is sitting in her castle and her hair reaches from her head to her heels, and all her strength lies in her hair".

They gave their horses rein and spurred and whipped them on, and began to climb the glass hill. When they got on the top, the horseshoes were half worn out. Riding on they found themselves at the castle gates. They dismounted, and Sugur-Mugur gave Peter a sword and said:

"Go into the castle. There you'll see twelve rooms, unlock all of them and in one you'll find a golden apple. Take it and put into your pocket. After that go up to Ilyana Kosinzyana while she is sleeping. Take the ring off her finger and if you can take the sword, and cut off half of her hair, and when she wakes, she'll follow you. Off you go and remember — if you don't do as I have told you we shall have to return empty-handed."

After that Sugur-Mugur whispered some magic words, breathed on Peter, and made him invisible.

Peter entered the palace unseen and unheard, unbolted the twelve rooms, found the gold apple in one of them and put it into his pocket. Ilyana Kosinzyana felt that something had happened, woke up and cried to the guards:

"Ho, there, go and catch the thief and bring me back the apple, or your heads won't stay on your shoulders much longer!"

The guards went off and thoroughly searched all through the palace and the courtyard but did not find even a fly. When eterything quietened down and Ilyana Kosinzyana lay in a deep sleep, Peter entered the room, where the maiden was sleeping, took the ring from her finger, and put it on his, then took off a ring from his finger, and put it on hers. When he looked at the maiden's ring he saw written on it: "Ilyana Kosinzyana. When I throw a flower from my plait only a brave man will pick it up". Ilyana Kosinzyana awoke and roused the guards.

"Ho, there, go and find the thief — my ring has been changed!"

The guards began to search every corner, each nook and hiding place, but all in vain.

Peter was enjoying himself in the courtyard, and strolling through the palace.

Ilyana Kosinzyana sent the guards away and began to stand watch herself. While she was sitting and watching, half of her hair suddenly fell to the ground. Peter had swung his sword and cut off half of her hair.

When Ilyana Kosinzyana saw it, she said:

"Who are you that have made me so powerless? Come out and let me see you. If you are an old man, you'll be my father, if you are a woman, you'll be my mother, if you are a maiden, you'll be my sister, but if you are a young man, you'll be my husband for my whole life."

Hearing her words, Peter went to Sugur-Mugur who breathed on him again, whispered some magic words, and made him visible.

Peter went back into the palace, and when Ilyana Kosinzyana saw him, she embraced and kissed him.

"From today on you are my husband, and for my whole life."

What followed next? There was a great feast to which Sugur-Mugur was also invited. After the guests had eaten heartily, Ilyana Kosinzyana breathed on the palace and turned it into a golden apple, then all three mounted their horses: Sugur-Mugur on the Black-Devil, Peter on the Bay-Prince and Ilyana Kosinzyana on a horse as white as the snow, and so they started for home. All day long they travelled, and at night stopped for a rest. The young couple went to bed and slept, but Sugur-Mugur watched over them. They rode for a year, then for two more. Old Sugur-Mugur did not sleep, but watched over them night after night. When there remained some three weeks still to ride, Peter sent a letter to the old man and the old woman to come to meet them, with a matchmaker to betroth them.

In the evening they stopped under a tree. The young couple slept, but their old friend watched over them.

Late at night Sugur-Mugur heard three birds which spoke with human voices in the tree. One of them said:

"Handsome young people, see what a wonder!
Sleep then, sleep then till breaking of day
Let them sleep longer, let them grow stronger,
Let them sleep on, and arise all the younger,
Let them be happy, and let them be gay!"

The second answered:

"What's the good of them being young and handsome if in three days the match-maker will meet them with a flask of poisoned wine, and as soon as they drink it, they'll die on the spot."

The third bird said:

"If anybody hears this and tells about it, he will be turned to stone right up to his knees."

So that's how the matter stood!

The letter went on its way, wandered here and there, and fell into the hands of the Forest Witch. As soon as she learned that Peter was coming with a bride she sent a match-maker with a flask of poisoned wine to kill him before he reached home. She knew that if Peter had skinned her wolf and her bear, she herself could expect nothing good from him.

Two or three days later a match-maker decorated with two rows of ribbons and hand towels met them. He came dancing along with a flask of wine ready to entertain them and betroth them.

Then Sugur-Mugur said:
"Peter, this is no time to stop here dancing and drinking. It's time to push on further towards home. Give the flask of wine to me, and let's go on."

Peter gave him the flask of wine but in the evening, when they stopped to have a rest, Sugur-Mugur as if by accident dropped the flask and smashed it. Where the wine gushed out, the ground was turned into ashes, and the grass was scorched black. When Peter saw it, he drew his sword and cut off the match-maker's head.

Two or three days later Peter sent another letter home to the old man and old woman, asking them to send him a best man, and some bridesmaids, so that they could come home with all the proper ceremonies.

In the evening they again stopped to rest under a tree. The young couple went to sleep, but old Sugur-Mugur stood and watched over them all the night long. At midnight the three birds flew in again and sat on a branch just above them. The old man heard their talk. One of them said:

"Handsome young people, see what a wonder!!
Sleep then, sleep then, till breaking of day.
Let them sleep longer, let them grow stronger,
Let them sleep on, and arise all the younger,
Let them be happy, and let them be gay!"

The second bird answered:

"What's the good of them being handsome? They had a narrow escape some days ago, but now they are in great trouble again. Tomorrow they'll be met by the best man and bridesmaids with flowers, and in each flower there will be hidden a wolf's fang and a bear's tooth, and as soon as they hold them to their breasts, they'll die".

The third bird said in conclusion:

"If anybody hears this and tells about it he will be turned to stone right up to the waist."

The letter went on its way and wandered here and there, and again fell into the hands of the Forest Witch. When she read that they were alive and were going to celebrate their wedding party, she called some forest demons, dressed them up, made up their faces, and gave them flowers for the bride and bridegroom but in each flower she placed a wolf's fang and a bear's tooth, so that when the young couple held them to their breasts, they would die at once.

Next day the three set out and rode for some time until they met the best man and witnesses and bridesmaids, who were laughing and joking and shouting as people do at wedding parties. When they offered the flowers to Peter and Ilyana Kosinzyana, to hold them to their breasts, Sugur-Mugur said:

"The custom requires that the flowers to be placed on their breast by the god-father and the god-mother, before the wedding ceremony Give the flowers to me to keep, until the god-father and god-mother come."

Sugur-Mugur took the flowers, and when he threw them away the ground fell in, and a lot of brambles and thistles grew out of them

Peter understood that some dirty work was afoot, took his sword and ran after the best man and witnesses. When he caught up with one of them, he cut off his head, and gave it to the ravens. All the forest demon's started running away, but only one of them got home alive. He ran to the Forest Witch and told her what had happened.

Peter, Ilyana Kosinzyana and Sugur-Mugur rode on further. At night they all stopped under a tree to take a rest. As soon as they stopped the young couple felt tired, and quickly fell asleep. Sugur-Mugur sat at their heads and watched over them. At the break of the day the three birds flew in again and began to speak with human toices. The first bird said:

"Handsome young people, see what a wonder!
Sleep then, sleep then, till breaking of day.
Let them sleep longer, let them grow stronger.
Let them sleep on, and arise all the younger,
Let them he happy, and let them be gay!"

The second bird broke in:

"What's the good of being young and handsome? They don't know what is in store for them. At night the Forest Witch will come with twelve dragons and will tear them to pieces."

The third bird said in conclusion:

"If anybody hears this and tells about it, he will xe turned to stone from top to toe".

Sugur-Mugur hearing the words of the birds, remembered them by heart.

In the morning they got up rode for some time, and at last they reached home.

"Thank the Lord!", said both the old woman and the old man, when they saw them at the threshold, and clapped their hands with joy.

"Greetings, mother and father. We are glad to see you looking so well and healthy!".

And then what happened? Well, they had hardly eaten supper, when night fell. Being very tired from such a long journey they all went to bed. Everybody slept soundly except Sugur-Mugur, who unsheathed his sword and sharpened it. At midnight a thunder and lightning storm began. It was not possible to tell if the sky was rumbling, or if the earth was boiling. It was the Forest Witch and the twelve dragons, who were

coming breathing flames and smoke from their nostrils and beating the earth with their tails. Sugur-Mugur went out of the house with his sword and cut down all the dragons one by one. When at last the Forest Witch came, she had fire round her feet, fire round her waist, and was spitting out flames and smoke. Sugur-Mugur began to slash at her too, but when he struck out with his sword it melted. He slashed and slashed until nothing remained but the hilt. The Forest Witch was still alive, but when he struck her with the hilt the evil-minded old hag fell dead. The place where she fell turned into a lake of pitch.

When Sugur-Mugur had got rid of them all, he threw the sword hilt away, which by chance fell on Peter's hand and scrached him. Peter awoke and cried:

"What's the matter, Sugur-Mugur? Do you want to wound me or kill me?"

"No, no, Peter, just look, I have cut off a lot of dragon's heads."

"Well, that is as may be, but why have you wounded my hand? I took you out of prison, but I shall put you back there for such a deed."

But he saw that Sugur-Mugur was telling the truth and that his conscience was as clean as grass after a rain-storm.

"Now," said Sugur-Mugur, "call the old man, the old woman and Ilyana Kosinzyana, and I'll tell you everything, as you don't believe that I didn't want to wound you, but when I finish telling you I shall die."

"Never mind, tell the truth, even if you die."

They all gathered and Sugur-Mugur began to tell everything from the very beginning: how when they were leaving the glass hill, and stopped to take a rest for the night, while Peter and Ilyana Kosinzyana were sleeping, he heard the three birds talking, and that one of them said that the couple were young and handsome beyond words. The other then said that the Forest Witch would send a match-maker with poisoned wine to kill them, and the third bird sang:

"If anybody hears it, and tells about it, he will be turned to stone up to the knees".

And when Sugur-Mugur said these words his legs became like blocks of stone.

Then he continued that three nights later the birds spoke again in human speech. One of them said that there was nothing in the world as beautiful as the two young people. The second one answered that it was no good being young and beautiful if on the next day they would die from the flowers which had been made ready by the Forest Witch with a wolf's fang and a bear's tooth in each one of them. The third bird then added:

"If anybody hears this and tells about it, he will be turned to stone to the waist".

When Sugur-Mugur said these words his body became a block of stone.

"The night before we came home I heard the three birds talking again. One of them said that Peter and Ilyana Kosinzyana would live only one day more, as the next night the Forest Witch would come with twelve dragons and would tear them to pieces."

And when he finished telling what he had heard from the third bird, Sugur-Mugur was turned into a block of stone from top to toe.

Peter and Ilyana Kosinzyana began to cry, and the old man and the old woman cried for three days on end, but they could do nothing. The block of stone stood motionless. On the third night they all dreamed the same dream. The old man got up the first and said:

"Listen to what I have dreamed. If we kill the red goat, and smear the block of stone with its blood, Sugur-Mugur will come alive again."

Ilyana Kosinzyana and Peter cried together:

"We have dreamed just the same dream!"

They all put heads together and decided:

"Let's kill the red goat because we can raise another one, but there is no other way of bringing Sugur-Mugur back from the dead."

So they killed the red goat, put the meat into the oven to roast, and they smeared the block of stone with the blood. It immediately crumbled as if it were ashes, and Sugur-Mugur revived.

"What a long sleep I have had," he said.

"You would have had a much longer one, if we hadn't killed the red goat," answered Peter.

"That's not right!" answered Sugur-Mugur. "The red goat is alive. Go and have a look."

When they looked into the oven they did not see red-hot coals, but a meadow where the red goat was grazing green grass, while her two kids were frisking about.

They were all so happy as they had never been before in their lives. Ilyana Kosinzyana took out the golde apple, and wheri she dropped it on the ground it turned into a place. It was so beautiful, that there was not another one like it in the whole world. Peter took out the golden apple which he had and when he threw it on the ground a most beautiful garden with different kinds of trees appeared.

After that the wedding party followed. They invited many people to it, laid out the tables around the palace, the musicians played and there was a great feast with dancing and good humour. Anybody who happened to be passing by was treated to wine and tasty food. I was a guest there too and ate and drank like all the rest. I have only just managed to wipe my lips, and throw the bones in the ditch.

And now good luck and good-bye
May you live till the day you die!

THE SNAKE-PRINCE AND THE KING'S DAUGHTER

In far-off times, in far-off times, when fleas wore horseshoes, size ninety-nines, when they skipped and danced and jumped so high, that they bumped their heads against the sky, well then, you know, long, long ago, there lived an old man who had no childrenó One day the old man said: "Sift some flour through the sieve, and bake some buns for me to take. I am going out into the wide world to find a child."

The old woman sifted some flour, baked some buns, put them into a bag, and saw the old man off. He walked and walked until he came to a little well. He stopped there to have a rest, ate, drank some water and dozed off. When he woke he found a little snake in his bag. The old man looked at him and thought:

"I shall take him to be our son and our support in our old age."

So he took the bag with the little snake, returned home, and entering the gate began to shout:

"Open the door, old woman, and come out to meet us."

"What ever have you brought home? What shall we do with a snake?" said the old woman, wondering at the unexpected present.

"He will be our son," said the old man.

They made a place for him on the oven, and before they could look round, he had grown so much, that there was no room for him there.

The old man and the old woman took him to the garret, and fed him for three days on milk and nut kernels. The snake grew quicly so that the beams cracked beneath him and the house sank into the ground because of his weight. On the fourth day the snake put his head out of the attic window and said:

"Father and mother, it is time for me to get married."

The old man and the old woman were very glad.

"And whom do you want to ask in marriage?" they enquired.

"The King's daughter."

While the old woman was thinking what to answer, the old man said:

"I can't go to him, my dear son, I am afraid he'll cut off my head."

"If you don't go, then I shall cut your head off."

So the poor frightened old man went to the palace and knocked at the gate. The guards let him in. He took off his cap, bowed to the King, and said:

"I wish you long life, your Highness".
"Thank you, traveller. What has brought you here?"
"I have come to ask you about uniting our two families. You have a daughter and it is time for my son to get married. Perhaps we could arrange a wedding party?"
The King flew into a rage, and ordered his executioners to whip him out of the palace, and to set the dogs on him. The executioners whipped him out, and unleashed the dogs, who bit him so badly that the poor old man hardly came home alive.
When the snake saw him crossing the threshold in such a deplorable state he stretched his head out of the attic and swallowed him. When he opened his jaws again the old man came out strong and in a new suit of clothes.
"How do you feel?" asked the snake.
"I feel very well, and I'm glad I am alive and strong as ever."
"And I am glad too, for you'll now be able to go to the King again and ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage."
"I can't go, my dear son, I am afraid he'll cut off my head."
"If you don't go, then I shall cut your head off."
So the old man went to the palace, and bowed again before the King:
"Long life to you, your Highness!"
"Welcome, old man! What do you need of me?"
"I have come to ask you about uniting our two families. You have a daughter not yet betrothed, and it is time for my son to get married. Perhaps we could arrange a wedding party?"
As the King had no desire to marry his daughter to the old man's son, he made impossible conditions:
"Do you see that hill?"
"Yes, I do, your Highness."
"By morrow morning you must make a valley there, and in the valley you must build a mill, and near the mill you must dig a large pond, and round the pond you must plough the land, and on the land you must sow wheat, and from the wheat you must grind flour, and from the flour you must bring me in the morning at daybreak fresh-made rolls of bread."
The old man came home and told the snake everything the King said.
"All right, father, go to bed and don't worry about it."
The snake came out of the attic and gave an ear-splitting whistle, and at once a host of snakes and serpents visible and invisible gathered round him.
"What are your orders, master?"
"Do you see that hill? By morrow morning you must make a valley there, and in the valley you must build a mill, and near the mill you must

dig a large pond, and round the pond you must plough the land, and on the land you must sow wheat, and from the wheat you must grind flour, and from the flour you must bring me two fresh-made rolls of bread in the morning."

Early next morning the snakes and the serpents brought him two hot rolls of bread.

The snake took them, put his head out of the attic window, and said:

"Get up, father, and go to the King with the hot rolls of bread."

The old man got up, took the hot rolls of bread and went to the palace. When the King saw that the hill had been turned into a talley, and the old man standing there with the hot rolls of bread, he went to the Queen and said:

"I ordered him to do all that in order to frighten him off, but he has fulfilled the task. What are we to do with him now?"

"Let me give him another task. By morrow morning the sea must be beating below my windows, and behind the palace as far as the eye can see there must be a vineyard, and before sunrise the grapes must be ripe so that when I get up I can wash my face in sea water, and eat ripe grapes."

The King returned and the old man asked him:

"Shall we join our families, your Highness?"

"We shall, old man, but you have to fulfil one more task. By morrow morning the sea must be beating below the Queen's windows, and behind the palace, as far as the eye can see there must be a vineyard, and before sunrise the grapes must be ripe, so that the Queen and all her courtiers can wash their faces in sea water and eat ripe grapes."

The old man went home, and the snake was waiting for him bursting with impatience.

"What did the King say?"

The old man told him everything the King had said.

"All right, father, go to bed and don't worry about it."

The snake came out of the attic, gave an ear-splitting whistle, and at once a host of snakes and serpents visible and invisible gathered round him again.

"What are your orders, master?"

"By tomorrow morning the sea must be beating below the Queen's windows, and behind the palace there must be a vineyard as far as the eye can see, and before sunrise the grapes must be ripe so that the King and Queen and all her courtiers can wash their faces in sea water and eat ripe grapes."

Early next morning the whole court was awakened by the splashing of sea water.

The King and Queen and all the courtiers got up, opened the windows and washed their faces in sea water. After they had washed themselves the sea rolled back, and in its place grew green grass. When they went into the banqueting hall, the tables were loaded down with ripe grapes.

In the morning the snake said to the old man:

"Go to the King, dear father, he has already washed his face, and eaten grapes for breakfast, and is in good temper. Go and ask him for his daughter to be my bride."

When the old man got to the palace, the sun was just rising.

"Good morning, your Highness"

"Good morning, old man. So you've come again?"

"Yes, I have, your Highness".

"What for?"

"I have come with the same request. Shall we not unite our families?"

"We shall, old man, we shall, if you fulfil my third task."

"What task is that, your Highness?"

"By morning you must make a golden road from my palace to the bridegroom's house. Across the mountains and marshes you must build golden bridges. On both sides of the road there must be golden trees with golden fruit, and in the trees there must be golden birds all singing in

different voices. Tomorrow morning you must bring me some of the golden fruit to eat, and wake me up with the singing of the birds."

The old man went home, and the snake was waiting for him simply bursting with impatience.

"What did the King say?"

The old man told him everything the King had said.

"All right, father, go to bed, and don't worry about it."

The old man went to bed, but the snake came out of the attic, gave an ear-splitting whistle, and at once a host of snakes and serpents visible and invisible gathered around him.

"What are your orders, master?"

"By morrow morning you must build me here a palace three times more beautiful than the King's. All must be of gold, with three rows of watch towers, all decorated with precious stones. You must also make a golden road from here to the King's palace. Across the mountains and marshes you must build golden bridges. On both sides of the road there must be golden trees with golden fruit and in the trees there must be golden birds all singing in different voices. The King and Queen must have golden fruit to eat, and must be wakened by the singing of the birds."

By dawn everything was ready. The King and Queen were awakened by the singing of the birds, and on the tables were heaps of golden fruit. Soon the old man appeared, and when he saw the King he bowed and said:

"Good morning, your Highness! The time has come to unite our families and to fix the day of the wedding party."

The King jumped as if someone has trodden on his corn. He rushed off to the watch-tower, and when he saw the golden road and the golden trees all full of golden fruit and the palace of purest gold there was nothing more he could say. He ordered the news to be sent round, and sent his heralds and messengers to all parts of the kingdom to invite people to the wedding feast. From all four quarters of the enormous kingdom people began to gather.

Then the King sent a carriage with four horses to bring the bridegroom to the wedding feast. The coachman drove up and stopped at the gate of the new palace.

The King's messengers bowed to the old man and presented him with a loaf of bread, and some salt, and asked him to bring out the bridegroom to drive to the waiting wedding feast.

The snake caught sight of the King's carriage from the attic window and cried:

"Why has the King sent such a light summer carriage for me? Go back and tell him to send an iron carriage with twenty four wheels, and twenty four harnessed horses."

When the King was told this his knees began to shake. He could not imagine what kind of bridegroom this could be, but as this was the bridegroom's wish, he ordered the blacksmiths to make an iron carriage with twenty-four wheels, harnessed it with twenty-four horses and sent it off to the old man.

Then the bridegroom got into the carriage and started off with his retinue of honour, but his tail had to be carried by three more carriages.

The King was waiting for him with lighted torches, glasses of sparkling wine and tasty dishes of every kind.

When the procession arrived at the King's palace gates the trumpeters sounded their horns, and the musicians began to play. The snake slid out from the carriage, and coiled himself all round the tables, so that the guests could sit on him instead of benches.

They celebrated the wedding party with a wonderful feast, and when all the singing and dancing was over, the bride and bridegroom returned home. When the King's daughter entered her new home she was astonished at everything she saw. She had never seen such riches, even in the King's palace. Everything was made of gold, and was so unspeakably beautiful, that it charmed all hearts. Then the bridegroom cast off his snake's skin, and turned into a very handsome prince. It was a real pleasure to look at him. He had a golden crown on his head, his robes were of cloth-of-gold from head to foot and decorated with priceless pearls and precious stones. They lived very happily together, and everybody admired them.

Some time passed, and the Queen went to see how her daughter was setting down with the snake.

"But, mother, dear, he's not a snake at all, he is a young prince and extremely handsome. In the daytime he puts on the snake skin, but at night he casts it off, and puts it at the foot of his bed."

"If that is so, my girl, do you know what you must do? Load a tray with red-hot coals, put it under the bed, and when he stretches out his legs the skin will fall off onto embers, and burn. Then he will have nothing to put on, and will remain as a prince."

The girl did as her mother advised her. She made a fire and in the evening when the snake undressed and went to bed, she filled a tray with red-hot embers and put it at the foot of the bed. The prince stretched out his legs while sleeping, the skin fell on the red-hot embers, and began to hiss and bubble so loudly that the sky was ringing and the earth began to tremble, and the echoes flew over the hills and far away.

The prince awoke and slapped his wife so that tears welled from her eyes. Three tears fell on her maidens girdle and turned into three iron rings.

"I had only to wear this snake skin three days more under my father's curse and then I could have cast it off for ever. Who ever advised you to burn it, did no good. From today on you must wear these iron rings and you

will not be able to break them until you travel over the hills and far away, where the water is blue, the fields are gold, and the grass is green. There you must cry aloud:

"Dear master, stretch your hand above me where I stand. Let the rings be all undone, and let me bear a son!"

The prince closed the door quickly benind him and was gone. In his tracks a mist arose which covered the earth and the sky.

The girl remained alone, weeping and sobbing, and then one day she left the palace and went after him. She walked and walked up hill, down dale, until she came to Holy Wednesday.

The girl knocked on the gate and said: "For pity's sake, let me in for the night!".

"If you are an honest girl, come in, and I will make you a present, but if not, go on your way, because I have a little dog with steel teeth which will tear you to pieces".

"Open the door, Holy Wednesday, I am an honest and unhappy girl".

Holy Wednesday opened the door and asked her:

"Are you the King's daughter, who must travel under your husband's curse over the hills and far away where the water is blue, the fields are gold and the grass is green?"

"I am!"

"Come in! Let me set my eyes on you, I have heard of you, now I'll see you too!"

The girl went in, and Holy Wednesday treated her kindly, gave her a pitcher of water to drink and a loaf of holy bread to eat. The pitcher and the loaf were magic. When she drank water the pitcher filled again. When she ate, the loaf grew whole again. Finally she gave her three gold apples. The girl took them and set out. She walked and walked a whole summer's day, till darkness fell and at last she came to Holy Friday.

The girl knocked on the gate and said:

"For pity's sake, let me in for the night".

"If you are an honest girl come in, and I will make you a present, but if not, go on your way, because I have a little dog with steel teeth which will tear you to pieces".

"Open, dear Holy Friday, I am an honest and unhappy girl".

Holy Friday opened the door, and asked:

"Are you the King's daughter under your husband's curse, who must travel over the hills and far away, where the water is blue, the fields are gold and the grass is green?"

"I am!"

"Come in! Let me set my eyes on you. I have heard of you, now I'll see you too".

The girl went in, and Holy Friday treated her kindly, gave her a pitcher

of water to drink, and a loaf of holy bread to eat. The pitcher and the loaf were magic. When she drank water the pitcher filled up again. When she ate bread, the loaf grew whole again. When she was about to leave Holy Friday presented her with a gold spinning-reel.

The girl set out and walked and walked up hill, down dale, until she came to Holy Sunday. She knocked on the gate and said:

"For pity's sake, let me in for the night".

"If you are an honest girl, come in, and I will make you a present, but if not, go on your way, because I have a little dog with teeth of steel, which will tear you to pieces".

"Open the door, dear Holy Sunday, I am an honest and unhappy girl!"

Holy Sunday opened the door and asked:

"Are you the King's daughter, who must travel under your husband's curse, over the hills and far away, where the water is blue, the fields are gold and the grass is green?"

"I am".

"Come in! Let me set my eyes on you, I have heard of you, now I'll see you too!"

The girl went in and Holy Sunday treated her kindly, and gave her a pitcher of water to drink, and a loaf of holy bread to eat. The pitcher and the loaf were magic. When she drank water the picher filled up again. When she ate bread the loaf grew whole again. When she was about to leave Holy Sunday gave her a silk kerchief, hemmed around with gold thread, and saw her off to the gate. There the girl said:

"I don't know which way to go, or which road to take".

Holy Sunday took a green leaf, and when she blew on it, the leaf flew from field to field, from valley to valley, and where it passed it left a path which led to the place where the prince was.

"He is there on that farmstead. He came to the land of the fairies and they gave him the food of forgetfulness and the drink of forgetfulness and he had forgotten you. Go there, but don't enter the farm-house, because he goes hunting every day. Stop by the well, and on the first day take out the apples and put them in the sunlight. On the second day put the spinning-reel on the edge of the well. On the third day take out the silk kerchief hemmed with gold thread, and spread it on the green grass. In the daytime the fairies will come to fetch water. They will see them, and want to buy them, but you must not sell them for money nor precious stones, nor anything else, but simply give them to the fairies so that they will let you sleep a night in the prince's room. Now go ahead. I wish you good luck and a successful journey!"

The girl thanked her, and set out. She walked and walked, past valleys with flowers and fields with streams and at last she came to the well. There she took out the three gold apples put them in the sunlight and began to

wait. Soon the fairies came to fetch water. They were not surprised when they saw the girl where no wandering birds ever flew, nor any travellers had ever been seen, but they were surprised by the three apples and asked her:

"Maiden, won't you sell us the apples? We can give you gold or precious stones for them, before somebody else buys them."

"I won't sell them for gold nor precious stones, I will simply give them to you without payment, if you let me sleep one night in the prince's room."

The fairies agreed. They took the girl to the farmstead, and in the evening, when the prince returned from hunting, they gave him the food of forgetfulness and the drink of forgetfulness and some poppy seed. The prince fell asleep as if he were dead. Then they took the girl to his room, and she began to weep and plead:

"My dear master, stretch, your hand above me as I stand. Let the rings all be undone, and let me bear a son!"

The girl wept and sobbed, but the prince heard nothing. The cock crowed thrice, day dawned, and the girl returned to the well, sad and mournful. There she took out the gold spinning-reel from Holy Friday and put it on the edge of the well. Then she began to wait.

Around noon the fairies came to fetch water. When they saw the gold reel they were very surprised and asked:

"Won't you sell this spinning-reel? We can give you gold or precious stones for it and have it as our own in the house".

"I won't sell it for money, nor precious stones. I will simply give it to you without payment if you let me sleep one night in the prince's room".

The fairies took the girl to the farmstead. In the evening when the prince returned from hunting they gave him the food of forgetfulness, the drink of forgetfulness and poppy seeds. The prince fell asleep as if he were a log. Then they took the girl to his room and she began to weep and plead:

"Dear master, stretch your hand above me as I stand. Let the rings all be undone, and let me bear a son!"

The girl wept and sobbed the whole night, but the prince did not hear and did not wake. At daybreak the cock crowed thrice, the girl left the room and again went to the well, sad and mournful.

She sat down near the well, took out the silk kerchief hemmed with gold thread from Holy Sunday, and spread it on the green grass. Towards evening the fairies came to fetch water and when they saw the kerchief, they were very amazed, and cried:

"Won't you sell this kerchief? We can give you gold or precious stones."

"I won't sell the kerchief for money, nor precious stones. I shall simply give it to you, if you let me stay a night in the prince's room".

The fairies took the kerchief and led the girl to the farmstead.

When the prince was returning from hunting the roster crowed:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! My master, for the third night already a King's daughter under her husband's curse will come into your room at night and sob and weep hot tears, and will ask: "Dear master, stretch your hand above me as I stand. Let the rings all be undone, and let me bear a son!"

The prince suddenly remembered and tears welled into his eyes. He went to his room and fell into a fever. The fairies brought him the food of forgetfulness, and the drink of forgetfulness, and poppy seeds, but he was so deep in sorrow that he had not seen his wife for such a long time, that he neither ate nor drank. At midnight the King's daughter entered his room and began to weep and plead:

"Dear master, stretch your hand above me, as I stand. Let the rings all be undone, and let me bear a son!"

The prince embraced her, and when he placed his hands on the rings they all broke, and she gave birth to a seven-year-old child. The prince was very glad, and went out into the courtyard, and when he gave an ear-splitting whistle, at once a host of snakes and serpents visible and invisible gathered round him.

"Why have you called us, master?"

"Bring me a carriage with twenty-four horses, I am going home!"

A carriage and twenty-four white horses appeared as if out of the earth. The prince, the King's daughter and their son got into the carriage and started back to his kingdom and his palace. The fairies came out to meet him, and begged him to stay, ready to lay their hearts at his feet, but the prince drove off like a whirlwind and was gone. He returned home to the old man and the old woman, and they all lived happily ever after.

JOHN THE POOR AND THE FAIRY OF THE LAKE

ong, long ago somewhere in a far off country there lived a man and a woman who worked as farm labourers at landowners as long as they lived. But their hard work was of no earthly good. If they served for clothes, they wore them out, if they served for money, they spent it, if they served for cattle, the cattle perished. Misfortune accompanied them all the time and there was no end to it. Both the man and the woman died of hard work and troubles, leaving but a hut and a small piece of land behind them. Their only boy, whose name was John, remained an orphan on that land. He had support from nowhere.

What could the boy do alone? He sowed the land around the hut with wheat. As time went on the wheat grew so high and nice that it was a real pleasure to look at it. It had only golden ears from the very root to the very top.

"Now," said John, "I have to look for a good sickle to cut down the wheat, so that it wouldn't shed its grains."

He went to fairs, then to some blacksmiths, bought a sickle and returned to cut down the wheat and to put it into corn stacks. But when he approached the field and looked at it, he saw that all the wheat grains had been shed by birds, and even the straw was eaten.

The boy remained very poor and had nothing to eat.

He walked downcast for some time and then he thought: "I shall sow the field with buckwheat and I hope to harvest some crop this year."

He sowed buckwheat which sprouted well, blossomed and was likely to bring a rich crop, but one night a white frost happened and the whole buckwheat was frozen from root to top.

Now the boy understood that a great trouble struck him and he went into the wide world. He walked and walked over unbeaten hills and along unknown valleys, until he came to an estate. He stopped there to serve for a year. A year later he got a colt as payment. Contented with it, he started for home. While walking home, he stopped at the edge of a forest to have a rest, but some wolves dashed out of it and ate the colt. What could poor John do? He went back to the landlord, at whom he had served. The master agreed to take him as a farm-hand, but he said:

"Well, John, tell me what kind of payment you would like. I'll give you, whatever you ask for."

John looked around and saw a millstone.

"I don't know, master, what to serve for, as I am unlucky, but let us agree that I'll serve you for that millstone."

"Poor me, my boy, how is it possible to work for nothing?" the master said, "choose something else for payment."

"I don't want to serve for catlle any more. I want to serve for that millstone."

They came to an agreement and the boy served honestly and diligently. When the term of the service came to an end, John got the millstone, took it home and put it before his hut.

When he returned with the wooden pails from the spring, he put them on the stone and gladly looked at them as if he had a great wealth.

But one day a terrible storm rose, the sky was covered with dark clouds and a heavy rain began to rage. The millstone was struck by the lightening and smashed into smithereens.

John looked at the millstone, and when he saw only fragments, he said:

"I have no good luck neither with crops, nor with cattle, nor with a stone.

I shall go into the wide world to look for another fate, for another luck."

He put what he had into his bag and set out more heavy-hearted than ever.

Being off, he walked and walked a whole summer day until he came to a princely forest. There was a man there who was stacking hay.

"I say, good man, help me to stack the hay, otherwise the sun will set."

"I'm ready to help you, why not to, when I am looking for work?"

They pulled the hay cocks together and managed to stack them by evening. The man had no money to pay in cash and gave him a rooster.

John took the rooster and went further, until he came to the Emperor's court. He knocked at the gate and a guard came out.

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak with the Emperor, to tell him about my troubles, maybe he will pity me."

The guard told him that if he dared enter the courtyard, they would hound him and then put into prison.

For three days and nights running John waited at the Emperor's gate, without drinking or eating anything.

Only three days later the Emperor heard him crying at the gate and asked:

"Who's there?"

"Your Highness, for some days already a man is standing there and waiting to speak to you!"

"Go and call him in!"

The guard went to the gate and told John to come into the palace. Poor John entered with the rooster under his arm and bowed down. The Emperor asked him:

"What troubles you and why do you have that rooster under your arm?"

"I have come to give it to the one who will judge me justly."

"Tell me what troubles you."

"Your Highness, my parents worked and worked their whole life, and I work from daybreak till sunset, but I have nothing in my house..."

The Emperor frowned:

"Well, traveller, where do you think you are and who has advised you to come with this rooster into the palace? Maybe you thought to make fun of me? None of the Emperors can do the judgement you ask for. Go away and don't come any more, otherwise your head will be chopped off."

The lad went out of the palace more heavy-hearted than he had been, when he had entered it. He asked and asked for the truth, but it was impossible to find the truth.

He set off anew and walked for a long time and a long way, until he came to a crossroad. There he went straight forward without turning one side or other and then he saw a blazing fire and a hermit with a beard which

reached his feet. The hermit called him and asked:

"Where are you going, good man, with this rooster?"

The lad answered:

"I am walking all over the world looking for somebody who could judge me and to recompense him with this rooster."

The hermit asked him again:

"What troubles you? Tell me what you want to find out?"

"My parents worked and worked their whole life, and I work from daybreak till sunset, but I have nothing in my house."

"It's not an easy task to give you a proper answer, brave man. Your fate cannot be explained. I advise you to get married, as together with your wife it will be easier to come across good luck."

The lad gave him the rooster and the old man showed him a path through groves and forests.

"Go along this path until you come to a willow grove. There you'll see a milk lake, where three birds fly to bathe. They leave their wings on the shore and turn into fairies. One has a dress of the colour of a lawn with flowers, the second has a dress like the moon at dawn, and the third, who is the youngest, has on a dress as nice as the sun with its rays. You have to take the wings of the youngest fairy, to hide them in the sand af the spring from the lake shore and to stay there until she cries three times:

"Come out, you seen and unseen man. You will be mine and I shall be yours!"

"Then you may come out and she will be yours. You will have to live in harmony as that fairy will be your wife."

"Good-bye and good health to you, old man!"

"Good luck and let success attend you!"

The lad set out and, while he was walking, he saw only green forests. He walked and walked until he came to the willow grove, where the babbling of a spring was heard. The lad stopped there to have a rest and eat something after his long travel. While sitting near the spring on the lake shore, he was all eyes and ears, waiting for the birds to come and bathe.

And late at night, when the moon was high in the sky, three birds flew up to the lake. They left their wings on the shore and turned into three fairies, who were extremely beautiful. One had a dress like a lawn with flowers, the second had a dress like the moon at dawn, while the third, the youngest one, was dressed in a frock which looked like the sun and its rays. It was so nice that the path she walked along was lit all around. They all three stepped on the grass, then on a stone and from the stone into the milk lake to bathe.

John saw very well where the youngest fairy had put her wings. He dashed at them as quick as he could, took and hid them in the sand of the spring. Then he hid behind some furrows.

The fairies bathed for some time and then came to the shore. The older fairies put on their wings and flew away, while the youngest one cried to return her the wings, otherwise she would flood the whole world with water.

At once a host of black clouds rose with thunders and lightenings, so that it seemed that the earth would be torn to pieces. The lad lay under the sand of the spring and did not even fret his eyelids.

Finding nobody among the willows of the grove, the fairy came up to the spring and said:

"Who has taken my wings? If it is an old woman let her be my mother, if it is an old man let him be my father, if it is a maid let her be my sister."

John was silent.

Then the fairy cried:

"Come out, you seen and unseen! If you are a lad, you'll be my husband till my death!"

He did not answer until she cried these words for three times. Only when she cried them for the third time, he asked:

"Shall we celebrate our wedding party?"

"We shall."

Then he came out and when they saw each other, they embraced and kissed, as the fairy had to be his wife forever, till their death.

In the morning they set out to get married, to unite their fates as the custom was. When the Sun rose and saw such a beautiful bride, he stood stone-still. Well, he himself wanted to have such a fairy. He dashed, seized and carried her into the realm of the sky.

The poor lad remained sad and grieved as he had many times before that.

"Poor me", he said, "it is quite clear that I have no luck in this world."

He went to be engaged somewhere either by month or by year. In such a way he came to a town. Just at that time some heralds came with news from the Emperor and beat the drum for three days running. They announced that the Emperor had a huge tree, the top of which reached the sky, while the branches grew over seas. The one who would dare climb up the tree and bring some fruit to the Emperor would get half of the empire.

Many people tried to climb up the tree, but they fell down and did not stand up any more.

John went to the Emperor one day and told him:

"Your Highness, let me climb up the tree."

The Emperor permitted him to do it and he began to climb from branch to branch high up to the sky. When he was tired he made a bed of branches and had a rest. He climbed and climbed up until he got to a place where the tree had three branches: one eastwards, the second southwards, and the third westwards. The eastward branch was full of apples, the southward one was full of pears, and the westward one was full of hazel-nuts. He

climbed the southward branch and began to eat pears.

The Sun saw him and said:

"How do you do, young man! What are you doing there?"

"How do you do! I am eating some fruit."

"Won't you come to my realm to urge on the rays, as I've been betrothed for about three days and want to celebrate my wedding party?"

"I'll come, why not to come? You'll have to give me three purses of gold coins and food four times a day."

"I'll give you as much as you ask for. The wages and the food will be brought at sunrise by Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out, at noon by the Uncle White Frost, in the afternoon by the Wolf-Iron-Head, and in the evening the supper will be brought by the Dragon-Gold-Scales, who boils stones and cares of rains. He supervises the lightenings and thunders. Do you agree?"

"I do."

"Then you have to say: hop, hop, let me get where I think! And you must think of the realm of the Sun."

John said:

"Hop, hop, let me get where I think!"

And when he said that he found himself at the Sun's palace.

Poor John was overtired. The Sun invited him to the table, treated him properly, then took him to the rays and showed him how to urge them on.

John carried out his duty exactly as he had been told to, from dawn till sunset. He just stopped in a gold garden to wait for his breakfast, but Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out was not in a hurry with the food. When John saw him coming, he cried from afar:

"Hey, you Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out, I am very hungry."

But Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out answered:

"You, brave young man, have only one task: to urge on the Sun's rays. You have no other task, while I am the master of the birds."

"And what concerns do you have?"

"I give them orders where to go and what to do. I advise them not to fly to the poor people and not to eat the wheat grains from ears, but to fly to the rich people."

John dashed at him, seized him by the chest, shook him violently and beat him with his fists.

"Hey you, why are you doing it?"

"Do you still ask me? Why did you allow the sparrows to eat my wheat with gold ears?... Your luck is that you are an old man, otherwise you wouldn't get off my hands."

John let him go and went further to urge on the rays. At lunch time he stopped again in another gold garden of the Sun's empire.

Uncle White Frost was late with the lunch. When the servant saw him, he began to reprove and scold him:

"Why are you late with the lunch?"

But Uncle White Frost answered:

"It's a blessing that you have no other work but to urge on the Sun's rays. But I am the master of the white frost, hoar frost, snow storm and blizzard."

"Oh, that's it! And what advice do you give to them?"

"I tell them not to go to freeze the crops of the poor, but to go to the rich, as they have many large fields, which they even don't know of."

John dashed at him, seized him by the beard and started beating him.

"What are you doing?"

"I know what I am doing! It's because you froze my buckwheat and I had no use of it. You froze it one night and in the morning it all was beaten down to the ground."

Uncle White Frost left the food and saved himself running away.

John ate and then went off urging the rays further on the sky, on the earth and along the wind breath.

At midday he stopped in a gold garden of the Sun's empire and was looking along the road to see if anybody was coming with dinner. While sitting and waiting he saw the Wolf-Iron-Head.

Come quicker, you Wolf, as I am tired of looking along the road and waiting for you."

"You have only one work to do: to urge on the rays, while I have so many things to do, that it is not so easy to tell."

"And what's your job?"

"I am the Emperor of the wolves. I tell them what to do, I care of them, don't let them go to the poor and eat the cattle they have, but go to the herds of landlords, where they can eat to satisfy themselves."

"Oh, you Emperor of the wolves, I served a whole year for a colt, and when I was going home with it, you sent wolves to eat it at the edge of a forest, so that I nearly died of sorrow."

John began to scold the Wolf, who escaped cuffing only running away.

After having his dinner, John started to urge the rays further on. He urged them on the sky, on the earth and along the wind breath till sunset.

At sunset he stopped in a gold garden.

"I am dying of hunger and the Dragon isn't coming yet."

Some time later the Dragon was seen coming head foremost, jumping from hill to hill, from valley to valley. John cried to him from afar:

"Hurry up, you Dragon, I am feeling a pain in the stomach. Why are you coming so late?"

"You have no other trouble but to urge on the rays, while I've got a lot of things to do and I don't even know what to begin and what to finish with."

"And what have you to do?" asked John.

"Well, you may know that I have to boil stones, to drive the rains, to direct the thunders, so that they would not strike down the houses of the poor people and leave them without shelter, but strike down only the houses of the rich."

John seized him by the throat at once:

"How could you break my millstone, which was so dear to me, and for which I had served a whole year?"

John addressed the Dragon in such a hostile manner, that the latter was at a loss how to go back the way he had come to him.

John had his supper and went further, urging on the rays.

In the evening, when he returned to the palace, he saw that the Sun was preparing for the marriage ceremony. And with whom do you think? With the youngest fairy!

John was so grieved and downcast that he took an ax and began to fell the trees in the gold garden on the Sun's way.

All the Sun's companions — Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out and Uncle White Frost, and the Wolf-Iron-Head, and the Dragon-Gold-Scales complained to him that day, that John the servant had punched them so heavily, that they had hardly escaped alive.

The Sun came up to John and asked:

"Why have you beaten Birdie-Flatbody-Spin-Out?"

"I had to beat him even heavier, because he had allowed the birds to eat my field of wheat. And what a field! Each straw was full of gold ears from the root to the top."

"He is guilty. And what about Uncle White Frost? Why did you shake him by the beard?"

"Because he froze my field of buckwheat, which was in blossom, it died and I got nothing out of it."

"If it is really so, then he is guilty. But why did you cuff the Wolf-Iron-Head?

"How could I not cuff him, if he had set his wolves free to eat my colt, for which I had served a whole year."

"He deserved that! And why have you punished the Dragon-Gold-Scales?"

"I have punished him because he struck down by lightening my millstone, for which I had served a whole year."

"It served him good! But me, what am I guilty of, that you have felled my gold trees and have plugged all my roads and paths?"

"It is through your fault, as you have taken my wife."

The Sun called the beautiful fairy and asked her:

"Beautiful fairy, whose are you?"

"I am poor John's!"

"If that's it, you may take her and off you go! The one who interferes in somebody's family life has no place neither in the sky nor on the earth."

And the fairy said:

"Oh, dear John, I have been waiting for you for a long time to take me to the earth to celebrate our wedding party."

John and the beautiful fairy went to the tree he had climbed up to the sky, picked up apples, pears and hazel-nuts and climbed down.

John went with the fruits straight to the Emperor and gave them to him.

When the Emperor saw John with fruits and with such a beautiful girl, his heart jumped into his mouth and his face darkened. Now he wanted by all means to have both that beautiful fairy and the whole empire. In short, the greedy Emperor summoned urgently his council and asked everybody what to do.

"Cut off his head!" the councellors advised him.

"Oh, what do I hear from you? How can I take his life without any fault?"

"Emperor, don't kill him. Give him some difficult tasks, so that he could not fulfil them, and then you'll execute him. Tell him to plant a vineyard as large as you can see around your palace, and by morrow morning let the bushes be mature and let ripe grapes hang on them so that you could pick them up from your bed."

The Emperor called John and told him:

"I see that you are a worthy man. From all those who climbed up the tree, you are the only one who returned with fruits, and I must give you half of the empire, but first you'll have to fulfil one of my orders. Till morrow morning the place around my palace must be planted with vine as far as my eyes can see, the vine bushes must be mature when I get up, the grapes must hang in the palace so that I could reach them from my bed."

"All right, your Highness", answered John, remaining sorrowful and thinking that justice might appear from somewhere.

He came to the fairy and said to her:

"I don't know if I shall get half of the empire or not, but I know that my head will be cut off."

"And what for?"

"Just listen what oder the Emperor gave to me — in a night to plant such a vineyard the bushes of which would bear grapes! Who has ever heard of anything like that?!"

"The one who gave you such an order meant not to do you good but to kill you. Don't grieve and don't be sad. Give me the wings you took from me and go to bed as you are overtired."

John went to bed, while the fairy took the two wings apart and, as if out of the earth, two big lions appeared with the caps in their hands. They asked:

"What is your wish, mistress?"

"Can you see the hills around the palace?"

"Yes, we can."

"You have to level the place and by morrow at dawn to plant a vineyard as large as the eyes can see, the grapes must be ripe and when the Emperor gets up in the morning, he must be able to pick them up from his bed."

And when the two big lions whistled once, a lot of lions began to come out of the earth. They were as many as the leaves on the trees, and as quick as the lightening. The two big lions sent them to work all around: to turn the hills into valleys and to plant a vineyard as the order had been. And they all worked the whole night through. Some of them ploughed, some of them planted the vine bushes, some of them tied the tendrils

to the props, others cut off the shoots and till dawn of day the grapes were ripe just to pick them up.

At sunrise carts, full of baskets with grapes, were coming to the palace.

The fairy awoke John.

"Hey, you John, get up and have a look at the grapes."

When he looked around he saw only vine bushes as far as the eyes could see.

The Emperor ate ripe grapes, came out on the balcony and wondered, seeing such a vineyard.

Just at that time the councellors and the noblemen came to him.

"He has done it, your Highness, but now you hawe to send him to bring the bewitched flute, which plays itself, from the depth of the sea."

The guard called John and told him the Emperor's order.

He returned sorrowful and heavy-hearted to the fairy and said to her:

"Now the Emperor has ordered me that and that."

"He has given you a hard task with the intention to kill you. The shelter of the Evel ones is in the depth of the sea and only they are able to make such a flute," said the fairy, taking off the ring from her finger and giving it to John. "Here, take it. In case of helplessness it will be of great use to you. When you miss me, you'll have to drop it down and to step behind it. Now good luck to you and let your trip be successful."

John said good-bye to her and set out:

By mountain and vale,
Up hill and down dale,
By pathways unseen,
And through forests green,

until he came to the seashore. He sat down sad and grieved there, and gave a deep sigh of grief and woe:

"Oh, oh, oh!"

Just at that moment a man appeared before him and said:

"I am the Sighman, why have you called me?"

John began to shed tears and to complain.

"How not to sigh and shed tears if the Emperor ordered me to bring him the flute, which plays itself, from the depth of the sea. And how am I to look for it in the water?"

"The evil ones can make such a flute in a period of seven years. But all this time you have to be wide awake and not to doze even an instant. Do you agree not to sleep?"

"I do."

Then the Sighman took John and carried him pick-a-back through water to the bottom of the sea. There Momon — the ruler of the Evil ones — asked him:

"Have you come of your own free will?"

"No, I have come involuntarly."

"All right. I let you alive. Otherwise it would have ended badly for you."

And Momon told him that if he did not sleep for seven years, the devils would make him a flute, which would play itself.

From that moment the Evil ones began to work persistently at the flute. They worked for three years running, and all that time John did not close his eyes. After three years he was overcome by sleep and began to doze.

"John, John, what are you doing? Are you sleeping?"

"No! I am not sleeping! I am not!"

"Take care not to sleep, otherwise we shall break the flute at once! It seemed to us that you were dozing..."

"I am simply sitting and thinking what is more in the world: grass blades or leaves in the forests?"

The devils from the bottom of the sea thought for a long time but they did not know that either.

"Wait a minute. We shall go to count them and then we tell you."

All the devils from the bottom of the sea went out and began to count. While they were walking far and wide on the earth, John had enough time to sleep and then to awake.

After the devils finished to count, they returned and said to him:

"There are two grass blades more than leaves."

And they began to work anew day and night. Three years later the flute was ready, it had only to be decorated and polished, but John again wanted to sleep and began to doze.

"John, John, what are you doing there? Are you sleeping?"

"I am thinking what is more in the sea: fishes or sand."

The devils reflected upon it, but they did not know. Wanting to know, they went to count.

John remained alone and had enough time to sleep and then to awake.

It took the devils much time to count the fishes and the sand in the sea. John awoke, looked at the ring and remembered the fairy. Feeling a great homesickness, John did not wait for the flute to be decorated and polished, took it, dropped the ring, and, following it, he came to the sea shore. When he stepped on the shore he met the devils.

"Stop, John! We have to finish the flute. There is not much to do: to decorate and to polish it."

"Let it be as it is! It plays well and I'll take it without being decorated and polished."

And stepping further he followed the ring and treaded on untrampled grass and unshaken dew, until he got to the palace.

He knocked at the gate and cried:

"Open, Emperor, as I have brought the bewitched flute, which plays itself."

Out came the Emperor with all his councellors and noblemen.

When they all gathered around him, John took out the flute and said:

"Bewitched flute!"

"I hear."

"Play a dance so that all the courtiers should dance."

The flute played a dance and all the courtiers danced till the last one.

"Here is, your Highness, the flute, which plays itself and which I was ordered to bring."

The Emperor took the flute, while John went out and started off to the place where the fairy was. There he went to bed without care, and slept a brave sleep for three days and nights, as he was overtired of such a long road and sleeplessness.

The Emperor, the courtiers, the noblemen wanted to try the bewitched flute as well, and they told it:

"Bewitched flute, play some long dances for us to dance!"

The flute began to play some dances, while the Emperor and the courtiers started to dance. One finished and another began. The Emperor and the courtiers danced, as if they competed among themselves, because the flute was bewitched and when it played even the stones danced around. They all danced and danced until everybody collapsed and still they jumped, as they did not know how to tell the flute to stop.

Three days later John heard something playing and saying to him:

"John, get up and go to the palace and take the councellors, the noblemen and the Emperor out of it, as they all died dancing. From now on don't care any more, because there is nobody to give you burdensome orders to kill you. I have played and got you rid of the Emperor and the counsellors. Now you have remained the master of the palace and the empire is yours from border to border."

This was the voice of the bewitched flute.

John followed the advice of the flute and ruled that empire. What else did he do? He sent letters by wind to all the villages and towns, that soon he would celebrate his wedding party.

And a lot of people gathered, as the empire was so large that it was difficult to take it in even with thought. And John celebrated a wedding party with rich tables and musicians.

I was at that party too, and had a delightful time for three days and nights.

Then, riding a spindle, I quickly have run,
To tell you the tale, as I've just done.

THE FEATHER-KING

Once there was an old man, who had an old wife, and they'd lived all their life, and when their days were nearly done, they were blessed with a little baby son. Just when they were thinking how to bring him up, how to teach him his way in the world, both of them died and the boy was left all on his own. Only Tomcat remained in the house, and what could he do with the boy? He began to bring the poor orphan up. He looked in the larder, he looked in the barn for bread, for ham, and for cheese to feed him. But there was nobody to light the fire, and there were no clothes to dress him. What way out did Tomcat think of? He took a feather-bed, undid the seam at one edge, put the boy inside among the feathers and he lived there without any trouble. It was nice and warm inside the feather-bed and Tomcat brought him food to eat. He looked after the boy very well, and decided to call him Feather.

When the boy grew up Tomcat said:

"Well, my lad, I shall get you married."

"And whom will you ask for me in marriage?"

"The King's daughter."

"But that can't never be!"

"You'll see yourself. Whom else should we ask?"

Next day Tomcat got up early in the morning, and went to see the King, as he had heard that he had a very beautiful daughter. On his way to the King he met a hare. Tomcat was frightened by the hare, and the hare by Tomcat, and they both ran away, one to one side, the other to another one, but behind a hillock they met face to face.

"Where are you going, Tomcat?"

"I am going to the King to complain that they don't let me live in peace in the village. They chase me, they beat me, and don't feed me."

The hare complained as well:

"They don't let me live in peace in the field. They chase me with hounds, shoot at me, and set traps to catch me. I can't find a quiet place for a moment to rest. I should like to go to the King to complain too."

"Well, you may go, if you like, but I am afraid you'll go in vain, because the King will not help you."

"Why not?"

"I am alone in the whole village. He will listen to me and will help me. As for you, he'll say that out of hundreds of hares, none had come to

him to complain except you. If there were about fifty hares he might listen and help you."

"I see!" said the hare. "Well, then, wait a minute. I shall gather together about fifty hares, and then we shall go."

The hare ran among the bushes, the gardens, and the orchards, gathered together about fifty hares and came back to Tomcat. Tomcat went ahead and the hares followed behind him. They walked along through villages and the people ran to their fences and said in amazement:

"Take a look, that Tomcat is leading about fifty hares!"

They walked and walked until they came to the King's palace. Tomcat knocked on the gate, and soon a soldier came and asked what they wanted.

"I want to see the King."

Tomcat and the hares were admitted into the courtyard. Then he was taken into the palace, and stood before the King.

"Your Highness, the Feather-King has sent you fifty hares as a present. He asks that you should give him your daughter's hand in marriage."

The King came out of the palace, saw the fifty hares and was amazed:

"He must be a great and skilful hunter if he has caught fifty hares. My hunters go for hares, but they catch no more than two or three. Your master caught fifty, and all alive too!"

Then Tomcat said:

"I need a shed to drive the hares into, since nodoby is guarding them."

The King ordered the butler to unlock a large room and to open the gate.

Tomcat went to the hares and said:

"Let us go. We have been given a room and we shall be fed. After that the King will come to listen to us and help us."

All the heres entered the room. The butler closed the door, locked it, and sent a soldier to guard them. Soon the hares understood that Tomcat had cheated them, and guessed what fate was awaiting them.

The King sat Tomcat at the table as an honoured guest. Tomcat praised the Feather-King so highly that the King said eagerly:

"Tell him to come and see me."

"He'll certainly come, your Highness, but at the moment he is very busy."

After a splendid dinner the King gave Tomcat some food for the journey, bid him farewell and saw him off.

Tomcat came skipping home, gave Feather the food from the King and said:

"Well, my lad, I shall get you married."

"To whom?"

To the King's daughter."

"And how will you betroth us?"

"Don't worry, I know just how."

A week later Tomcat set off again to see the King, and by midday was far away from home. Walking along the road he met a fox and when they saw each other both of them were frightened, the fox by Tomcat, and Tomcat by the fox. They both ran in opposite directions, but after some time they met nose to nose behind a hillock.

"Where are you going, Tomcat?"

"I'm going to the King to complain."

"What's troubling you?"

"They don't let me live in peace in the village: they chase me, they beat me, and don't feed me, and I'm sick to death of it."

The fox' eyes filled with tears, and he complained too:

"Lately it has become impossible for me to live in the fields. They chase me with hounds, shoot at me, and drive me out of my den with smoke. Take me with you, dear Tomcat, to make a complaint and receive justice."

"I don't advise you, dear fox, to go alone. If there were about fifty foxes, that would be another thing. I am alone in the whole village, the King will listen to me, and will help me. As for you, he will ask why the other foxes do not complain but only you. If the King saw about fifty of you, maybe he would believe you, but otherwise not."

"Wait a minute, Tomcat, soon we shall gather together about fifty foxes and we shall all go to the King."

Tomcat waited for a time, while the fox ran through valleys and groves and marshes and returned, with fifty foxes. After they had agreed what to do, and how to speak, they all went together to the King's palace.

As Tomcat knew the way, he went ahead. The foxes followed behind him in a pack. In the villages they passed through the people ran to the gates with wide-open mouths, crying:

"What a wonder! Not long ago Tomcat passed by with a bunch of hares, today he passes with a pack of foxes. Where are they going?"

They walked and walked until they came to the King's palace. Tomcat was taken straight before the King and made him a deep bow:

"Your Illustrious Highness, the Feather-King has sent you fifty foxes as a present. He asks for your daughter's hand in marriage."

The King ordered his servant to let in the foxes and to prepare a feast for Tomcat.

Tomcat went with the butler, who opened the gates of the palace and let the foxes in. In the palace yard the servants were just killing and skinning the hares. There was a deafening howling and screaming.

The foxes got frightened and asked:

"Who is screanning there?"

Tomcat answered:

"A few days ago some hares came to the palace to make a complaint. The King listened to them all, gave them justice, and now they are having a banquet. They've got so drunk that they are singing and screaming their heads off."

When the foxes heard that they asked Tomcat:

"Tell them to take us to some other place, and not put us with them, as they are drunk, quarrelsome, and spoiling for a fight."

The butler showed the foxes into another room, locked the door and sent a soldier to guard them.

When the foxes saw that they were locked in, and under guard, they all became very frightened. They soon understood their mistake, and guessed what their fate was to be.

The King welcomed Tomcat gladly to the table, loaded down with tasty dishes. He wondered very much what kind of hunter the Feather-King was, if he had caught fifty foxes at once, and all of them alive.

"When my hunters go chasing foxes, they bring back one or two dead carcasses with the fur all torn and spoiled."

"He is brave and strong," said Tomcat. "There is nobody in the world as brave as he is."

"It would be an excellent thing if he came, so that we could meet. It is clear that he is a worthy man."

"He'll come, your Illustrious Highness, he'll come."

After the feast Tomcat returned home with presents and food from the King, and said to Feather:

"Well, my lad, I shall get you married."

"And whom have you chosen as my bride?"

"The King's daughter."

"Oh, stop making fun of me!"

"You'll see yourself, I have brought some presents and some tasty food for you."

"Are they from the King?"

"Of course."

"I can't believe it!"

"From the King himself, don't you see what you are eating?"

After a while Tomcat set out again to the King's palace. On his way he met a wolf. They both became frightened and ran in opposite directions, but soon met head-on behind a hillock.

"Where are you going, Tomcat?"

"I am going to complain to the King."

"And what's troubling you?"

"Lately I have no life nor peace in the village. They beat me, they chase, me, and find fault with me all the time. That's why I have decided to go the King to tell him everything and to obtain justice."

The wolf complained of his lot too.

"I am also chased in the fields, and in the forests by the hounds, and people shoot at me, and set snares for me. Wouldn't it be better if I go to the King to complain?"

Tomcat answered the wolf:

"Wait a minute, wolf. Let us put our heads together. Don't be in a hurry to go to the palace. I am going, it's true, but you see, I am alone in the whole village, while there are hundreds of you, and if you go alone, the King may not listen to you. It will be quite another thing, if, say, about fifty of you go. The King will certainly receive you then, and will give you justice. But you alone will not get any help. The King will ask why the other wolves do not come to complain. If you all gather together now, I could wait for you, and lead you to the palace to obtain justice,"

"Wait a little, then, Tomcat, while I go to gather together my relations and we'll all come with you."

The wolf ran through the woods and forests and soon returned with fifty other wolves, and they all set out for the palace.

Wherever they passed the people looked at them with wideopen eyes.

"Here, take a look, that same Tomcat is passing by now with a pack of wolves! Where are they going?"

Tomcat came to the King's palace with the wolves, and when the watchmen saw them they became frightened, and did not know where to hide.

Tomcat was taken straight into the palace, made a deep bow to the King and said:

"Your Illustrious Highness, the Feather-King has sent you fifty wolves as a present. He asks you for your daughter's hand in marriage."

The King went out on the balcony, took a look at his present, and ordered his servants to bring them in as quickly as possible. The butler ran and opened the gates, and all the wolves entered the palace yard. Just then the King's servants were skinning the foxes alive and there was such a howling and a screaming, that it made your ear drums rattle.

The wolves were terrified:

"What is that screaming? Help! Help!"

Tomcat calmed them down:

"Don't be afraid, and set your minds at rest. Some days ago a pack of foxes came to the King and complained of their hard life. He received them well and gave them justice. Then he ordered a feast for them, and they began to enjoy themselves, eating and drinking. They have got quite drunk and are now singing and screaming their heads off."

"Tomcat, ask them not to put us with the foxes. Those drunkards may start pestering us."

The butler showed them into another room, locked the door, and placed a guard there.

Only then the poor wolves understood that something terrible had happened to them, and that they would all be skinned alive, but what could they do?

The King invited Tomcat to his rich table, offered him the best dishes and the finest wine, and couldn't stop wondering at such a brave and generous hunter.

"My hunters bring back a wolf very seldom, even when they make a great chase, and go with their hounds and guns, but they have never brought back an alive wolf!"

"Your Illustrious Highness, the Feather-King is a very skilful hunter and nobody can surpass him!"

"How can we manage to persuade him here? We should be very glad and highly honoured to receive him!"

"I shall certainly tell him to come."

When Tomcat prepared to go home the King gave him many precious presents, food for the journey and soldiers to accompany him.

Tomcat went straight home to the young lad.

"Get up, Feather," he called.

"What has happened?"

"We must go to the King to celebrate the engagement and to arrange the wedding party."

Feather was very glad. He got out of the feather-bed, and went with Tomcat. They walked and walked until they came to a wide river, where Tomcat said:

"Go under the bridge and wait there till I come."

The lad went under the bridge, while Tomcat set off to the town. There he went from shop to shop and bought helmets, caps, shakos, busbies and all kinds of head-gear and spent all the money he had. Then he went to the river and threw them all into the water.

"Now," said Tomcat to Feather, "wait for me here under the bridge, and when the King comes with his soldiers, don't come out, but wait until I bring you some clothes to put on."

"Very well, I shall do as you say."

Tomcat ran quickly to the palace. When the King saw him coming, he came out to meet him.

"Why hasn't the Feather-King come this time?"

"He was on his way to the palace, your Illustrious Highness, but a great misfortune happened. On the way here we were crossing over a river, and all his soldiers got drowned, in a very deep part and only their

helmets and hats are floating down the water.

With the greatest difficulty I managed to save the Feather-King, but his carriage was lost and all his clothes, and he is waiting naked under a bridge."

The King hearing of such a misfortune, ordered his servants to prepare his carriage and horses, to bring some clothes to the Feather-King at once.

Tomcat ran ahead and brought him the royal clothes. Then Feather put them on, but when coming out from under the bridge, he could not tear his eyes from the beautiful clothes, turning first to one side then to the other to see them better.

When the King noticed it he asked:

"Why does the young man look at his clothes so?"

Tomcat answered:

"He doesn't like them very much, your Highness, he had much more beautiful ones."

"So long as he is safe, that's the main thing, we shall make him more beautiful clothes later, and we shall gather a regiment of soldiers for him too."

The King took him into his carriage and escorted by the troops of soldiers they drove to the palace in great splendour. At the entrance to the palace the Queen met them with her daughter, who was extremely beautiful.

The young couple became engaged and soon after that the wedding party took place. People from all over the kingdom came to the wedding party. They feasted for a week or maybe for a whole month. The King showed the Feather-King his dominions, his possessions and his army. After that he said:

"Now let us go to our son-in-law to see his kingdom and his possessions."

Tomcat replied:

"Let us go, your Illustrious Highness, to see everything he has."

Tomcat knew a spot where some dragons had their palaces, estates, cattle and farms. He arranged the visit when all the dragons were working in the field. He told the King to prepare his troops, his carriage and horses and to follow him.

The King gathered his regiments with their cannons, his musicians, his horsemen, and a whole string of carriages, and ordered them to start.

Tomcat walked on about a mile ahead of them. When he came to the estate of the dragons he saw a herd of cattle. Tomcat called the herdsmen and told them:

"Good fellows, soon the King will pass this way with his army and with his daughter's wedding procession. He will ask: "Whose cattle are these?" You must say that they belong to the Feather-King. Then he will

throw you a lot of money and you'll become rich men. You must not say that they belong to the dragons, otherwise he'll shoot at you with his guns and kill you."

"Very well, we shall do as you say, Tomcat," answered the herdsmen.

Shortly after that the herdsmen heard the cannons firing, and the music playing and ran to the road to have a look.

When the King was passing by, he stood up in the carriage and asked:

"Whose cattle are these?"

The herdsmen answered:

"They belong to the Feather-King! They belong to the Feather-King!"

The King was very glad to hear this. He threw them money and drove on.

By that time Tomcat had come to a herd of horses. He called the herdsmen and told them too:

"Soon the King will pass by. He'll ask you whose horses are these. You must answer that they belong to the Feather-King, and then he'll throw you money. You must not say that they belong to the dragons, otherwise he'll shoot at you with his guns and kill you."

Before long the King arrived with his army. The herdsmen came to the road to have a look.

The King stood up in his carriage and asked:

"Whose herds of horses are these, good fellows?"

The herdsmen answered as Tomcat had taught them.

"They belong to the Feather-King! They belong to the Feather-King!"

The King threw some gold pieces to the herdsmen.

Tomcat went on and saw some flocks of sheep and some herds of swine. He made a sign to the shepherds and to the swineherds to come near and then he told them:

"The King is coming over the hill with a great army, his musicians and his daughter's wedding procession, and will ask you all whose herds of swine and flocks of sheep and fields these are. If you don't know how to answer and say that they belong to the dragons, he will shoot at you with his guns, and take the herds and flocks. But if you know what to answer and say that they belong to the Feather-King, the King will throw you money and you will have riches to take home."

The shepherds and swineherds were very glad:

"Thank you for giving us such good advice. We had no idea what was in store for us."

Tomcat went on his way. The King came along afterwards with his musicians and his army. The shepherds and swineherds ran to the road to see them When the King was passing by, he stopped the coach and asked:

"Whose flocks of sheep and herds of swine are these?"

The shepherds and the swineherds answered at once:

"They belong to the Feather-King! They belong to the Feather-King!"

The King was very glad and proud when he saw that his son-in-law had so many flocks of sheep and herds of swine. He took out a handful of gold coins and threw them to the shepherds and swineherds. They thanked him and went off to mind their flocks and herds.

Running on a little further Tomcat saw the dragon's palaces.

The dragons had very beautiful estates and palaces, and so much wealth that they did not even know the full amount.

When he came up to one palace, he looked in and saw that the gates were open, the doors were open, and the tables were loaded down with tasty dishes. The dragons were just ready to have a feast. Tomcat came up to the dragons and said:

"Terrible danger has befallen you. Disaster threatens. The King is coming with a great army and all his cannons to kill you."

The dragons at first thought that it was a joke, but when they saw the army coming and heard the guns booming they were horrified.

"What can we do? Where can we hide?"

Tomcat looked into the dragons' yard and saw some haystacks and some ricks of straw. He said to them:

"Hide yourself in hay, and in the straw, and he won't find you."

The dragons were very strong, went to a rick of straw, raised it up and hid in the middle.

What do you think Tomcat did then? He set the straw on fire, and ran to meet the King, crying:

"Your Illustrious Highness, the straw has caught fire and is burning."

The King answered:

"All is well so long as the bridegroom and the bride are healthy, and the cattle are alive, we shall find more straw easily enough."

Meanwhile all the dragons were burnt to death in the fire and not one of them escaped.

The King with his army and the wedding procession came to the palace full of joy. The musicians began to play and the wedding party continued at the bridegroom's new palace. After the wedding party the Feather-King remained the master of the dragons' palaces and estates. He became so rich and happy as he had not even dreamed about.

Some time later Tomcat went to the Feather-King and talking about this and that, he asked him:

"Well, I hope you are glad that I made you King?"

"Of course, I am, and I am everlastingly grateful to you too."

"And how will you reward me?"

"I shall take great care of you, keep you warm and feed you well, until you live to a venerable old age, since I am rich and powerful now!"

"What will you do with me after my death?"

"There is nobody in the world I treasure more than you. It will be very

Where he meets good words, good cheer.
And now
We must say farewell, I fear.
And if we meet again, my friend,
I'll tell you a story with no end.

BASIL THE HANDSOME AND LEONORA GOLDEN-LOCKS — SISTER OF THE SUN

A tale is a tale, and a story's a story, if this didn't happen, who'll get all the glory?

Long ago there lived an old man and an old woman who had a very lovely daughter. She was as beautiful as the break of the day, very busy and clever with her hands and as lively as a spring breeze. Whoever happened to see her at work or the fire in her eyes, or the colour of her cheeks, he remembered her his whole life. But if a young man passed by and saw her, his heart began to beat more quickly. One day she took two golden pails and went to the well to fetch water. After she filled the pails, she decided to take a little rest. Then she noticed a stem of basil on the well brim. Without thinking she plucked it and smelled it, and all at once she knew that she was going to have a baby.

When her parents heard what had happened, they scolded her so harshly that the poor girl could not bear it any more and quietly left the house and disappeared.

She was so scared and so deeply grieved that she walked and walked without stopping, until she came to a distant forest, where she found a cave. She thought she would take a short rest, and went in, and coming towards her, she saw an old, old man, coughing and groaning.

"Who are you and how did you get here?" asked the old man, raising his heavy eyebrows with his stick.

The girl began to weep and sigh, and then she told him everything that had happened to her, how she was going to have a baby, and how she had got to his cave.

When the old man heard such a story, he spoke to her kindly, and wouldn't let her go anywhere else, but persuaded her to remain with him in his cave.

And so they lived together, and the girl found comfort for her trouble, and the hermit for his old age. Each morning three goats came to the en-

trance of the cave. The old man milked them, and so they were fed.

The time passed by, and the girl gave birth to a son.

When the boy was born, they bathed him in the morning dew, so that all hatred and evil thoughts should be washed away from him, and then they passed a candle and a piece of iron over his head, so that neither fire nor sword could touch him in the future. While the mother was taking care of the child, the old man searched about in the crannies of the cave and found a sword and a club which he had used in his youth. He presented them to the little lad so that they should be of good service to him, in his future life. The old man wished the child good luck and named him Basil after the flower his mother had plucked. His mother called him Basil the Handsome, because he seemed to her such a fine lad.

When Basil the Handsome grew up he hunted in the forests and groves as far from the cave as his eyes could see. Once he came to a valley, and when he looked down it seemed to him that there was a greenish lake in which the sun was bathing. But when he came nearer and nearer, he saw a palace of gold studded with pearls, shining over an enormous impenetrable forest. He had never seen anything so beautiful. With his sword and club at his waist, he went straight towards it. Before long he stepped over the threshold of the palace. The doors and the windows were open, but nobody was to be seen neither inside the palace nor outside. He went in and looked through room after room, then he went outside and looked all around. Suddenly he heard the forest roaring, and the trees cracking, and seven terrible dragons appeared.

With horny head of goat,
With shaggy, ass's coat,
With wolf's jaws open wide,
All green and fiery-eyed.

They were coming to the palace, and as soon as they saw Basil the Handsome they all pounced upon him.

Basil the Handsome unsheathed his sword and when one of them crossed the threshold he cut off his head. One after another he killed six of them, but when the seventh came his sword could not pierce him. Basil the Handsome struck him on the head, then on the chest but all in vain! Seeing this he took his club and was ready to strike him down, but the dragon realizing that his end was near, ran away and hid in the ninety-ninth room in a stone pit.

Basil the Handsome locked and bolted the door, put the key into his pocket and well-contented with himself went on further, leaving the palace and the dense forest behind.

He returned to the cave in good spirits, and when he saw his mother he said:

"From today on we shall live in a palace. We shall leave this cave because I have found a beautiful big palace."

Basil's mother was very glad and went with him to the palace of gold and pearls, where they settled in and became its owners.

"Everything here belongs to us," said Basil the Handsome, "but don't dare to open the door of the ninety-ninth room because there is still one dragon there."

"Don't worry about that, my son. If he wants to eat you, I shall be sure to keep the door locked."

Taking the key she tied it with ten knots in a handkerchief and hid it so that nobody could find it.

Now their life became very happy, and full of good things. They had a splendid home, there was plenty of game to hunt, and nature around was very beautiful. They lived there for a very long time.

But as it sometimes happens when spring already shows its beauty, a storm sweeps up ready to tear everything on earth to pieces.

The mother of the seven dragons lived in another kingdom. They had been brought up by that old hag who was as black as soot and so spiteful that when she cast a glance at the earth it took fire. The old hag waited and waited for the seven dragons to return on their usual visit, but at last, feeling something unusual had happened, she swept off like a whirlwind in a rage and came to the palace to see what they were doing.

When she found out what had happened to them she clapped her hands to her head. Full of fury she dashed at Basil the Handsome's mother, seized the key, set the dragon free, and pushed her into the pit where he had been.

Then she made plans with the dragon how to kill Basil the Handsome.

"You must challenge him to a fight."

"I am afraid," said the dragon, "his blows are far heavier than mine. I think it is better to go our own way while we are safe and sound, and not let him set eyes on us, or it will be the worse for both of us."

"Very well, leave him to me!" I shall send him into a snake's lair to meet his death."

Saying these words she hid the dragon while she herself spun round like a top and took on the form of Basil the Handsome's mother. Pretending to be very sad and ill she sat down to wait for him.

One day passed, then two, and Basil the Handsome returned from hunting. As soon as he stepped over the threshold the old hag began to sigh and moan.

"Oh, my dear son, you went off and I thought you were lost. You would probably have come home quicker had you known that I was ill, and there was nobody to help me. If only I had some bird's milk now I should be cured, and soon be on my feet again."

Basil the Handsome was very grieved when he heard this, and took a pitcher and went off, saying that he would return soon with the bird's milk.

He walked and walked over hills and valleys until he came to a beautiful house. He knocked on the gate and a maiden's voice answered:

"If you are a good man, come in, but if you are a bad man, go away, because I have a dog with fur like iron spikes and steel teeth. If you enter he'll tear you to pieces."

"I'm a good man, a good man," answered Basil the Handsome. The gates were opened, and he entered a house with open doors, and open windows, and lit by rows of candles. And there he saw a very beautiful maiden, who lived there.

"What brought you to our lands, young man?" she asked him.

"I'm looking for bird's milk."

"I have never heard in all my life of such a thing, but as you are a good man, I shall do you a good turn and shall find out. A little later I shall go to my brother the Sun, for he knows where everything is to be found."

And that was how Basil the Handsome met Leonora Golden-Locks the sister of the Sun.

Later on when the traveller fell asleep Leonora Golden-Locks went to her brother the Sun and began to ask:

"Don't you know, dear brother, where bird's milk is to be found?"

"Far away, dear sister, far away is the bird's milk found. To get there one has to walk for many weeks on end towards the east, to the Copper Mountains. But it is impossible to get it, because that bird is so enormous. Her wings are as large as the clouds, and if she catches anybody, she takes him to her nest and gives him to her chicks to tear to pieces."

The sister of the Sun was filled with sorrow and fear for the traveller, who was going to meet certain death. Wanting to help him, early in the morning she led out of the stable a horse with six pairs of wings, and gave it to Basil the Handsome, saying:

"This horse will help you. Go to the east and ride until you come to the Copper Mountains. Whether you manage to get the bird's milk or not, call on me when you return."

Basil the Handsome thanked her and rode off on the horse.

By mountain and vale,
Up hill and down dale,
By pathways unseen,
And through forests green.

After a while he saw something like a copper wave. The nearer he came the bigger it rose, higher and higher, and changed into a hill, and the hill into a mountain. When he came to the foot of the mountain he saw that it was so high, that the sky was resting on it. You have never seen such a

mountain! Nothing but coppery copper. Looking up and down and trying to measure it from the base to the peak, Basil the Handsome noticed high up in the sky a bird circling round with wings as large as two clouds. He spurred the horse on, and in one moment he was on the top of the mountain. What did he see there? In separate copper nests one by one sat some chicks as big as buffaloes, still without feathers and all of them shrieking from hunger. Looking around Basil the Handsome saw several crevices in the copper rocks, and hid with the horse in one of them, near a nest.

Before long the bird appeared, flew down from the sky, and let out of its beak some milk in every nest. Circling round on its wings, the bird came to the nest near which Basil the Handsome was hiding. Plucking up courage he stretched out his pitcher and the bird poured the milk straight into it. Immediately he mounted his horse and was gone.

Behind him the bird heard the chick still screaming from hunger, and when it looked round saw Basil the Handsome.

The bird rushed after him like a wild demon, but it could not catch him, because it had only one pair of wings, while the horse had six and flew six times quicker. Returning home, Basil the Handsome rode and rode:

By mountain and vale,
Up hill and down dale,
By pathways unseen,
And through forests green,

until he came to the home of Leonora Golden-Locks, who met him most gladly and invited him to rest awhile. She gave Basil the Handsome something to eat and drink, and he lay bown to sleep. Leonora Golden-Locks, knowing how things stood, hid the bird's milk in a safe place and poured some cow's milk in the pitcher.

After resting Basil the Handsome rose and taking the pitcher in his hand he said:

"Dear sister, you are very good to me and I felt very well here, but I should feel better on my way home, where my sick mother is waiting for me."

"I wish you a safe and happy journey, and don't forget to come and see me again," said Leonora Golden-Locks.

Basil the Handsome bowed, said farewell and was gone. When he arrived at the palace the old hag spun round like a lop, as if some one had pierced her with a fiery arrow. She jumped into bed and began to moan and groan, pretending that she was at death's door.

"A good thing that you have come dear son," she whined. "I have been waiting such a long time. Have you brought anything to cure me?"

"I have," said Basil the Handsome, and gave her the pitcher. The old hag raised it to her lips and drained it.

"Thank you, dear son, now I feel a little better!"

After that she lay down but she did not sleep. She was thinking and thinking where to send Basil the Handsome so that he should never return to the palace. She thought and thought and then suddenly sat up, pretending that she was worse, moaning and groaning, and said:

"Oh, dear son, the fever has returned. I dreamed that if I eat wild boar's meat I shall be better."

"I'll go to find it at once, mother. I'll do anything to make you feel better!"

Saying these words he mounted a horse and rode off. He rode and rode until he came to the home of Leonora Golden-Locks.

"Are you pleased to see me?"

"Very pleased indeed. Come in and rest!"

He sat down and began to tell Leonora Golden-Locks what troubles he had.

"Don't you know where I could find a wild boar? The fever has returned to my mother and she feels that it would be the only remedy".

"I'm afraid I don't know, but rest here this evening and I shall ask my brother the Sun. He will certainly know, because up there he sees everything and knows where everything is."

Basil the Handsome rested till twilight, when the Sun having laid his rays to rest in the west, came home for the night.

His sister came to him kindly stroked his tired head and enquired:

"I have heard some talk of wild boars. Do you know in what land they are to be found?"

"Far away, dear sister, far away to the south where in fields, the wild grass weaves and the forests have shady leaves."

"And how can one catch a young hog for eating?"

"There is no way to catch one because the forest is so thick that even my rays are not able to penetrate it. I see them only in the middle of the day when they go to wallow in the clay pit, but you can't get near them, for they tear everything to pieces with their fangs."

Leonora Golden-Locks told Basil the Handsome what she had learned from her brother. Now he knew where to go and what to do, he mounted the horse and set out.

He rode and rode:

By mountain and vale,
Up hill and down dale,
By pathways unseen,
And through forests green,

until he came to the field where the wild grass weaved, and then to the forest with shady leaves. When he entered the forest it became as dark as if he were under the earth.

The horse flew up above the highest trees in the forest, and soon Basil the Handsome saw the clay-pit.

It was just at the middle of the day when he heard the wild boars grunting.

Basil the Handsome watched the wild boars coming out to wallow in the mire, and as a fine youngster passed by him he seized it by the ears, jumped on its back and away he went with the other boars chasing him. If Basil the Handsome had not such a swift horse he could not have escaped death.

But he quickly threw the boar over the saddle-prow, jumped up behind it and off went, his horse saving him from the fangs of the boars. Now he went riding gladly along, and singing a song, thankful that he had fulfilled another difficult task.

On his way home he called in again on the sister of the Sun. While he was having a rest, Leonora Golden-Locks took the wild boar, and put an ordinary domestic pig in its place, then she saw Basil the Handsome off on his journey as if nothing had happened.

Basil the Handsome arrived home and when the old hag saw him she gritted her teeth with a rage until sparks flew, but then she hid her anger and said in a weak voice as if she was mortally ill:

"Oh, dear son, I am so glad to see you again. If you had come a little later you wouldn't have found me alive. Kill that boar as soon as you can and give me some of its meat to eat."

Basil the Handsome killed the pig quickly, roasted a piece of meat over the red-hot coals, and when it was nicely cooked he gave it to her.

"I feel a little better now," said the old hag after she had eaten a mouthful. But when she had eaten it all, she began to groan and to wail more pitifully than before.

"My dear son, my poor son, I have given you so much trouble and sent you on such long journeys, but if you want to see me alive and well, go just once more. My fever is getting worse again, so bring me the water of restoration, and the water of life, otherwise you won't be able to save me from the clutches of death."

"I shall go, dear mother," answered Basil the Handsome and again set out.

He rode and rode until he came to the home of Leonora Golden-Locks.

"Dear sister," he said, "nothing has cured my mother. She has asked me to bring her the water of life and restoration. Do you know where I can find it?"

"Take a rest, and I shall do my best to help you this time as well!"

When it got dark she went to her brother, who had just returned home.

"Brother Sun, from the sky you see everything on the earth. Do you know where the water of life and restoration is to be found?"

"It is very far, dear sister, very far away over ninety-nine seas and ninety-nine countries, in the Manna Field. But nobody who tries to get this elixir of life manages to return home, because at the border of its kingdom there is a griffin which lets anybody pass in, but when they come back it waits for them and not only drinks their water, but kills them too."

When Basil the Handsome heard where to go, and how long to ride, he was not afraid. He took his sword and club, mounted his horse, said farewell to Leonora Golden-Locks and off he rode. The road was long, and he rode without stopping round many seas, and counted many borders. He rode until he had passed the ninety-ninth sea and the ninety-ninth border, and came to a very rich country. Not a single dry twig, not a single blade of dried grass, but everything full and bursting with life.

Riding happily through that country he came to two rocks. From under each one of them a spring gushed out.

"These are the springs I am seeking", thought Basil the Handsome, and to be certain he caught a butterfly from a flower. He tore it into pieces, and threw it into one of the springs, and the butterfly joined together again. He threw it into the other spring, and at once it revived and flew off. He took a full gourd of water from each spring and started for home. Shortly after, when he came to the border of the kingdom, he heard the trees creaking as if in a great storm. The sky became dark, and from one side a griffin with twelve heads appeared, gnashing its teeth and lashing its tail.

Basil the Hansome took his sword in one hand and the club in the other, and when the griffin stretched one of its heads he stunned it with his club and cut it off with his sword. The griffin feeling that its end was near, flew up in the sky, but Basil the Handsome's horse flew higher, and the brave lad cut off all its heads, and it fell dead on the ground.

Calmly and hindered by nobody, he rode back to Leonora Golden-Locks. Tired of fighting and travelling Basil the Handsome went to bed. While he was sleeping Leonora Golden-Locks exchanged the water of restoration and the water of life in the gourds with pure water from a spring.

Basil the Handsome, never for one moment suspected the sister of the Sun who had helped him so open-heartedly, and after resting he mounted his horse and rode home.

When the old hag saw him safe and sound for the third time her face became black as a thundercloud. She was so angry and spiteful that her heart was seething with poison. She calmed down a little when she drank the water but then she began to think how to get rid of Basil the Handsome.

After letting him rest a while she called him and asked him kindly:

"My dear Basil, you have travelled so much up and down those long,

long roads, that you have probably lost your strength. Let me see if you can break this silken cord!"

Then she took a silken cord, bound it up round his arms and chest, and tied it at the back.

"Try, dear son, to see if you haven't lost your strength in the places you have been."

Basil the Handsome breathed once and broke the cord into five or six pieces.

"Now let us see if you can break two cords."

Basil broke them as well.

"Well, your strength is still good, dear son, still good. But let us see if you have kept it all."

Then she bound him with three silken cords. Basil the Handsome breathed once, but he did not manage to break them, he tried for the second time, but the cords only chafed him. When he breathed for the third time the three threads cut into his flesh to the very bones.

The old hag jumped up and cried:

"Come out, dragon, and settle accounts with Basil the Handsome!"

The dragon came out of his hiding place and with a hideous laugh took the sword and hacked Basil the Handsome to pieces like a cabbage.

Then the dragon gathered the bits and pieces into two ragged sacks, flung them across the saddle whipped up the horse and said:

"Gee-up, you stupid horse, and carry him dead where you used to carry him alive!"

The horse galloped off like a ghost, and the earth shook beneath his hooves. He galloped back to the place where he had been brought up, fed and taken care of, and stopped just in front of Leonora Golden-Locks' house.

The sister of the Sun came out, but she did not see any traveller. She saw only her horse all lathered in foam and sprinkled with blood. Full of grief she ran to the horse, and when she took down the sacks she saw that it was all that was left of Basil the Handsome.

"Oh, my poor lad, what a death they have dealt you!", she moaned and began to put him together, piece, by piece, until he was almost as he had been before.

Then she ran into the house brought out the gourds with the water of restoration, and the water of life, the wild boar's body and the bird's milk. Where the pieces of Basil the Handsome's body were missing, she cut pieces from the wild boar and so she restored Basil's body as it had been before. After that the sprinkled it with the water of restoration and the pieces grew together, then she sprinkled him with the water of life and he opened his eyes, breathed a deep sigh and said:

"Oh, what a long time I have slept!"

"Ah, my dear, you would have slept for ever, if I had not been here!" replied Leonora Golden-Locks, giving him the pitcher of bird's milk to drink.

Basil the Handsome drank the milk, and with each sip felt such strength as he had never had before. He could crush a flint rock to dust by one blow of his club.

When Basil the Handsome felt his feet again and had shaken off the last of his weakness, he remembered the dragon, seized a sword and started straight off back to the palace.

When he arrived there what a sight his eyes met.

The dragon and the old hag were having a great feast at a table full of tasty dishes. On one side his mother was standing with a napkin in her hand, gathering up the bones, and serving them fresh dishes.

When Basil the Handsome entered the banqueting hall, the two evil creatures felt that their end had come. The brave lad made a big fire in the copper oven, and pushed them in there to burn to ashes, so that no traces of them should remain on the earth or in the air.

Basil the Handsome greeted his mother, who had suffered so much and had shed so many bitter tears, and they were both over-joyed, and embraced and caressed each other.

Shortly after that a new and even greater joy was added to their own.

Basil the Handsome and Leonora Golden-Locks were married, and a magnificent wedding party took place with merry music and laughter. A host of people came, and at the head of the table sat the Sun, who wished them a happy life, together as man and wife.

After the wedding party they lived in peace and content for a very long time, and if they are not dead they are living happily still.

THE MAGIC HORSE

Once upon a time there lived a man who had three sons. Two of them were good enough lads, as they always listened to their father's advice. The youngest one, named Teleyesh, was very naughty and disobedient.

One spring the father sowed his field with maize. When it grew a little and began to wave in the wind, the father noticed that it was trampled down by horses' hooves, and some of the leaves had been eaten. He came home looking very grieved, took counsel with his sons, and decided to send them one by one to watch the maize. The first evening the eldest of them went

to the field, but he fell asleep and did not manage to find out anything. He only made a laughing stock of himself.

Then came the turn of the middle one. He watched for some time, but in the dead of night he fell asleep, and slept even deeper than his elder brother. He did not manage to find out anything.

Then it was the turn of the naughty and disobedient son. As soon as the sun set, he went to the maize field. Neither of his elder brothers believed that he could do anything, but still they let him go crying after him: "He has no more sense than a mad March hare, and there's no hope that he'll succeed."

Coming to the field, Teleyesh looked for a place from which to watch. He found a clump of weeds on a hillock. From there he could see the whole field of maize.

Shortly after midnight the earth began to tremble from beating hooves, and a herd of horses swept into the field. One of them came near the clump of weeds and began to graze. The youngest son crept up at once and leapt up and seized it by the mane. The other horses ran away in fright while the one captured kicked about and bucked and turned, and twisted, but could not free itself from the lad's strong hands. When the horse saw that it was impossible to break free, it began to beg Teleyesh:

"Dear master, let me go free in the glade, and when you need me, I'll come to your aid. Pull three hairs out of my mane and keep them with you. When you are in trouble take them out, blow over them and say:

"Gaitan, magic horse, leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master

And I'll be at your side in a moment."

The boy pulled three hairs out of the horse's mane and hid them very carefully.

From that day on, the herd of horses no longer tramped the maize field. The maize grew tall, untouched by anybody.

Just at that moment the King sent his heralds to announce that he wished to find a husband for his youngest daughter, who was extremely beautiful. Many young men were dying to have her as their bride, but the King wished to have the very best son-in-law in the world. He placed his daughter in the highest tower of his palace, and from the ground to the balcony on the tower he built a marble stair-case, white and narrow. Then he said that whoever managed to ride up the marble steps on horseback and reach the princess' balcony and take the ring from her finger, should have her as his wife. News was sent round the whole kingdom that during the three appointed days all young men who wanted to try their luck should come to the palace on horse-back.

On the first day many princes and many simple youths gathered before the palace. All of them were on horse-back, burning to try their fortune.

The two elder brothers asked their father's permission to go and put themselves against their rivals, since they had good horses and rich clothes.

The younger brother was eager to go too.

"You stay at home, and don't disgrace us before the people! How can you go, when you have neither riding horse nor good clothes?" the elder brothers shouted at him.

"I shall ride the white mare, as she is not working now, and I shall go as well!" said Teleyesh. Then he went out of the house, mounted the white mare, and started for the King's palace.

When he had gone half way his brothers caught up with him, and boxed his ears and slapped him in the face, so that he saw stars.

"Go home, the King's daughter is not for the likes of you!"

Teleyesh did not utter a single word. He continued on his way, and when his brothers disappeared in the distance he took out the three hairs, blew over them and said:

"Gaitan, magic horse, leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master!"

Miraculously a very fine horse appeared before him. It was as black as a raven's feather, with a long wavy tail, a velvety shining coat and a curly mane. The horse pawed the ground with its hooves, and asked:

"What do you wish, my master?"

"I wish the King's daughter to be my bride."

"One moment, master. I shall prepare for the road!"

In a moment Gaitan came back with a gold saddle and stirrups and a silver bridle.

Prancing before its master, the horse bowed and said:

"Go into my left ear and come out through the right one."

The lad entered the horses's left ear and came out of the right one dressed as a bridegroom.

"How do you want me to carry you: as swift as the wind or as quick as thought?"

„Neither like wind nor thought. Carry me at a good footpace as befits a brave knight best of all!"

The horse started off up hill and down dale until he caught up with the two elder brothers, who drew to the side of the road. They bowed, and asked him respectfully:

"Where are you from, brave sir?"

"From the village of Slapshire", he answered slapping their faces, and then rode on.

At the palace the music was playing, and crowds of people were waiting for the test to begin. At the end of the queue the youngest of the three sons stopped with his magic horse Gaitan. As he was the last to come, he would be the last to try his fortune. The King gave the signal for the test to begin, but none of those who tried could mount the marble staircase. Finally the turn of the last rider came, he rode up the staircase on his black horse with a gold saddle and silver bridle, but did not quite reach the balcony because he rode a little too slowly. He turned his horse back and nobody saw him any more.

The crowd broke up, curious to see what the next day would bring.

Teleyesh rode on until he came to the spot where he had left his white mare, and placed his rich clothes on the saddle and let the black horse free. Then he rode home and arrived there before his brothers.

The two elder brothers returned later and began to boast and brag how they had ridden their horses. Then they told how a bold young fellow from the village of Slapshire riding on a fine black horse, had almost reached the balcony on the tower.

Next day as the elder brothers began to get ready to leave, the youngest one mounted the white mare and went on ahead.

At the middle of the way his brothers caught up with him, and when they saw him looking so shabby and ragged, punched and cuffed him with their fists and sent him home. He stopped his horse and, when his brothers had disappeared over a hill, he took out the three hairs, and blowing over them, said:

"Gaitan, magic horse, leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master!"

Immediately the horse stood before him, as if it had sprung out of the earth.

"What do you wish, my master?"

"I wish to try my luck today as well."

"Go into my left ear and come out through the right one."

The lad entered the horses's left ear, and came out of the right one dressed as if for his wedding party.

"How do you want me to carry you: as swift as the wind, or as quick as thought?"

"As swift as the wind."

The horse galloped off like a whirlwind, so that the earth was shaking beneath its hoof beats. In the twinkling of an eye he caught up with his brothers.

"Welcome, bold sir!" said his brothers bowing and drawing aside on the road.

"Good-day to you, if you are good men!"

"Where are you from?"

"From Cuffshire", he said, and coming nearer them, cuffed them soundly with his fists, then set spurs to his horse and galloped off so swiftly that they could not see him for dust.

To the hustle and bustle of the crowd, and the playing of the musicians the tests began again. Out of all the rivals nobody managed to come near the balcony on the tower, only Teleyesh on his magic horse Gaitan riding a little faster almost touched it. The people couldn't take their eyes off him and wondered at his daring. They went off to their homes curious to see what would happen on the third day.

The last day came. The two elder brothers began to get ready to leave before dawn. When Teleyesh got up, he also began to prepare for the road.

Before his brothers could give him some task to keep him at home, he had already left. They caught up with him at the middle of the way, and being in a very bad temper they set about him with their whips, so that his whole back was tingling.

"Go home, you idiot!" they shouted.

Teleyesh stopped his horse and when his brothers had passed over the hill, he took out the three horse hairs, blew over them and said:

"Gaitan magic horse leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master!"

Immediately the horse stood before him, and said:

"What do you wish, my master?"

"I wish the King's daughter to be my bride."

"Pass through my ears and hold yourself firmly in the saddle."

Teleyesh passed through the horse's ears, and came out richly arrayed. He mounted the magic black horse, and began to look into the distance.

The horse asked him:

"How do you want me to carry you: as swift as the wind or as quick as thought?"

"As quick as thought," answered Teleyesh.

He caught up with his brothers in a flash, and they drew aside on the road, bowed deeply and asked respectfully:

"Where are you from, brave sir?"

"From Whipshire," he answered, and raising his whip gave them a good warming up across their shoulders.

At the King's palace there was a great commotion. The people were hustling and bustling about, and the musicians were playing. The test had already begun. Princes whipped up their horses, but none of them mounted more than two or three steps up the staircase. At last came the turn of Teleyesh and Gaitan the magic horse. He rode through the crowd like a flash of lightning, and flew straight up the steps to the balcony on the

palace tower. The King's daughter gave him her ring, and he kissed her hand. She placed her hand on his head, and his hair turned golden.

Teleyesh set spurs to his horse and galloped off.

It stopped near the field where his white mare was grazing, and he placed his rich clothes on the saddle and set it free.

Then off he rode home again. The King was waiting with tables laid and the torches burning, but the bridegroom had disappeared so quickly that nobody knew where he was. When he saw that the bridegroom did not return, he sent his soldiers to look for him.

The soldiers set out and marched day and night from village to village, from house to house, but they could not find the lad with the ring. One day they came to the old man with the three sons. The two elder brothers knelt down with their caps in their hands when they saw the King's messengers. "Where is your other brother?"

"He is sitting by the stove warming his toes in the ashes!"

"Call him and let us have a look at him. This is the King's order. Nobody to remain unseen."

The two brothers called him, saying:

"Take off your cap, these are the King's messengers."

"Welcome to our humble dwelling," said Teleyesh.

When he doffed his cap, everything around was lit up by his golden hair. The courtiers and the soldiers marched him off to the King's palace.

When the King saw him without his horse, in his home-spun shirt, bare-footed, girdled with a woollen scarf, he ordered him to be sent to a cabin far from the palace, beyond the bounds of his kingdom; without celebrating any wedding party. He sent his daughter after him with these words:

"As long as I live I shall not visit that cabin. If I should ever happen to turn my head and look at it, may I lose my sight!"

This was the oath which the King swore as he mounted his throne, and sent all the people who were waiting for the wedding feast away.

The King's daughter went to the cabin humbled, and full of sorrow, because there a life she had never dreamed of was waiting for her. Teleyesh summoned his magic horse Gaitan, and he made the inside of the cabin better than any palace, and they lived there happily for a long time.

One day a bad piece of news spread all over the kingdom. An enemy army had crossed the King's border, and was making war.

The King sent trumpeters to all the corners of his kingdom, called his two elder sons-in-law, gave them each an army and off they went to the war.

Hearing about the war, his youngest daughter went with a request from his third son-in-law to send him to fight.

"How can he go to battle? He has neither horse nor sword, nor club, nor uniform."

"Your Highness, give him the equipment of an ordinary soldier and let him go if he wishes," said the eldest son-in-law.

"Very well," said the King, "let him take our one-hundred-and-five years old ass and go."

The youngest daughter brought the news back to their cabin. Teleyesh, who was very glad that he had been admitted into the army, mounted the old ass and set out to the war. Urging on the ass, he came to a bridge, where it stuck deep in the mud. When he saw that it was impossible to drag it out he thought he might at least save the skin. When he came to the road with the skin of the ass, it so happened that the King was passing by with his generals and his armies.

"See, here is our brave warrior! He has just skinned the ass and is taking the skin home," laughed the King, and went on to the war.

Teleyesh dragged the skin along the road until the King had gone, then took out the three hairs, blew over them and said:

"Gaitan, magic horse, leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master!"

Immediately the horse stood before him.

"What do you wish, my master?"

"I wish that we should go together to the war."

"Just one moment, master while I get ready for the fight."

In a flash the horse returned with a gold saddle, with silver stirrups, and a silk bridle.

"Now, my master, pass through my ears and let's go ahead."

Teleyesh passed through the horse's ears and came out ready for battle with broad sword and club.

"How do you want me to carry you, my master: as swift as the wind or as quick as thought?", asked the horse.

"Neither like the wind nor thought, but as a brave warrior's horse. Take me where the fight is fiercest, to lend a helping hand."

When they reached the field of battle the King and his elder son-in-law were threatened with defeat, and the army was in disorder, and the generals about to surrender.

Teleyesh swooped like a hawk upon the enemy, slashing left and right with his broad sword. The enemy fell to the ground like grass beneath the scythe.

The King, seeing the victory was theirs, invited the brave warrior to come to the royal victory feast:

"Come and sit at my right hand at table."

"Your Highness, don't be angry with me, but I shall come to your feast some other day," answered Teleyesh and, spurring his horse, galloped off.

At the bridge, where he had stuck in the mud with the ass, he dismounted and, passing through the horse's ears, became as ragged as he had been before. The horse returned to his pasture and meanwhile Teleyesh took the ass's skin and started home.

He had walked for a short time when the King caught up with him.

"See, our brave warrior, hasn't got home yet. He started home before us, and will get there after us, while we have managed to go to war, to fight and to conquer," said the King to his elder sons-in-law.

At the palace the King gave a great victory feast which lasted for several days.

Soon after that another enemy crossed the King's border.

The King again gathered his army and got ready with his elder sons-in-law to go to the war. Before his departure his youngest daughter came with a request from Teleyesh to take him to the war too.

"Let him take the old horse from the water-cart, and go if he wants to," said the King.

Teleyesh took the old horse from the water-cart and went on ahead. He rode and rode until he came to the bridge where the ass had stuck in the mud. The horse was so lean and old that he too stuck in the mud and had no strength to drag himself out. Shortly after that the King, his two elder sons-in-law, and the army appeared.

"Take a look at the scoundrel! He's buried my horse for me!"

When all the armies had passed and nobody was to be seen, Teleyesh took out the three hairs, and blowing over them said:

"Gaitan, magic horse, leave your pasture,
And come at once to your master!"

"What do you wish, my master?" asked the horse, who appeared before him immediately.

"I wish to go together with you to the war."

"Pass through my ears and mount me."

When Teleyesh was dressed for battle, armed with a good broad sword and with his feet firmly in the stirrups, the horse asked:

"Master, how do you want me to carry you: as swift as the wind or as quick as thought?"

"Neither like the wind nor thought, but as a brave warrior's horse. Take me where the fight is the fiercest to lend a helping hand."

The horse started off up hill and down dale and arrived on the battle-field when the fight was fiercest, and the King and his generals were almost defeated. Teleyesh swooped like a hawk upon the enemy, and mowed them down in rows, like the mowers mow a field of wheat.

One of the enemies, who was braver than the others, desperately attacked him and wounded him slightly on the arm, but soon the others became frightened and ran away scared.

When the King saw that the brave warrior was wounded, he took his silk handkerchief, bound his wound with it and said:

"You are welcome, my brave young man, to our victory feast as you have saved the day for us. Come and sit at my right hand!"

"Your Highness, some other day I shall come to your festive table, but now don't take it amiss. I cannot come", said Teleyesh and spurring his horse, rode off.

At the bridge he set the magic horse free, skinned the old horse, and started for home.

At the King's palace there was a great feast which it seemed would have no end.

The Queen being glad of the victory in the two wars, and being sorry for the fate of her youngest daughter, took some food and some drink from the royal feast, and went to the cabin to present it to her daughter, as it was such a great day of merriment and festivity. She knocked at the door but nobody answered. When she looked through the window, she saw both of them asleep, and noticed the King's silk handkerchief bound round the arm of her son-in-law. The Queen ran back all out of breath to the King.

"Dear King, dear King, I have just seen your handkerchief in our youngest son-in-law's hut!"

"Where? How? Impossible! The wounded warrior must be far away by now!"

"No, no! I have seen it. Go and take a look now. He is lying asleep with your silk handkerchief bound round his arm."

The King went to the cabin, and when he turned his head he was struck blind. They led him back by hand. The merriment at the palace ended and a great sorrow came upon the land, that the King had lost his sight. Many doctors and wise old women came with various enchantments and medicinal herbs, but they could not cure him. The King spent his days in darkness. Then the word went round that if the King would smear his eyes with milk from a lioness he would regain his sight. The two elder sons-in-law began to prepare to go out into the wide world to find milk from a lioness, to save their father-in-law from his suffering. When the King was blessing his sons-in-law before their departure, his youngest daughter came and asked him to give her a horse and permission for Teleyesh also to go to find the medicine.

"Go away, and don't remind me of him. He is the sole cause of my suffering today."

"Your Highness, give him a horse and let him go. Maybe he'll go and will never return to vex you again in your distress," said the sons-in-law.

"Take the old horse from the second water-cart, and let him go, I do not wish to hear anything more about him!"

His daughter, offended and heavy-hearted at the King's words went to Teleyesh and told him everything. He calmed her down, took the horse from the water-cart, and set out at once.

He rode and rode until he came to a clearing. There he let the horse graze while he took out the three hairs and summoned his magic horse.

"What do you wish, my master?" said the horse who immediately appeared.

"The King is blind, and he has heard that if he smears his eyes with the milk of a lioness he will regain his sight."

"There is only one lioness in the world with such milk. Mount me, and hold firm in the saddle," said Gaitan.

They went as quick as thought, so that nobody could see them, and came to a forest which was so dense that even the flies could not make their way there. The magic horse flew over the tallest trees straight to where the lioness with the milk was lying. As she was sleeping in her den, Gaitan jumped with all four hooves upon her, and pressed her to the ground so that she could not move. Teleyech dismounted and taking a pitcher of milk from the lioness, wrapped it up with great care, mounted the horse and rode back as swift as the wind. The lions chased after them and roared so loudly that the trees in the forest creaked, but she couldn't catch them up. After a while Gaitan slowed down and said to his master:

"Soon we shall meet your brothers-in-law, who have ridden long, long roads, but have not found anything and are returning home."

"As long as I can remember, my brothers-in-law and the King have done their best to get rid of me, but not for nothing do people say that he who digs a pit for others falls into it himself. My dear little horse, take me to a herd of cows to get some milk for my brothers-in-law."

After they had done this, Gaitan jumped three times up into the air and turned into an old cow while Teleyesh was turned into an old man with a beard down to his waist. Slowly driving the cow, as an old herdsman usually does, they met the King's two elder sons-in-law.

"How do you do, royal princes," said the old man.

"How do you do, old man!"

"Why are you riding through these deserted places where even the birds don't fly?"

"Trouble has brought us here. Our old King is blind and he has heard that he could cure himself with the milk of a lioness. We have set out to find it."

"Oh, my young fellows, you must give up such a thought. I was in the prime of life, and out of great love for my young wife who had lost her sight set out on such a long road, and you see for yourself how old I am returning. There is no need for you to go for such an old man as the King, since you won't find him alive when you return, even if you do find the cure."

Hearing about the long distance they must travel the sons-in-law grew disheartened, but in order to fulfil their task they asked the traveller:

"Old man, give us a little of the lioness' milk, we shall give you anything you wish, and more than you ask for."

"I don't know if my wish will suit you."

"We can give you gold, land, castles..."

"No, I don't need those things, but I should like to try out my branding-iron on your backs."

The young men looked at each other, whispered together and then said *that they agreed he might try out the brand on their backs.*

Soon they gathered some brush-wood, lit a fire and heated the brand, and the old man stamped it on their backs leaving the name "Teleyesh" Then he gave them some cow's milk and bid them farewell.

The young men were so glad that they had got the milk, that they did not feel the burns from the brand. They rode as hastily as they could to the King's palace. When they arrived, they went straight to the King, made a deep bow and said:

"Illustrious King! Illustrious King!
Round the world we've made a ring,
Witnessed many a marvellous thing,
Now the cure to you we bring!"

The King was overjoyed and let them smear some milk on his eyes once, twice, three times, but still he could not see anything. Instead of that his pain grew greater, and his eyes smarted.

Just when everybody in the palace was weeping because the King's blidness could not be cured, his youngest daughter came with the lioness' milk from Teleyesh. Kneeling before the throne she said:

"Your Highness, try and wash your eyes with this:

"Over ninety-nine seas,
Over ninety-nine leas,
To give back your sight,
That you see the sun's light,
Take this milk now, I pray,
That I bring you today!"

"Go away, you come with thoughts of death and not of life."

"May we both die if you feel worse after this cure," said the daughter weeping.

They had scarcely touched his eyes with the milk when the King cried aloud with joy:

"I see the light. Wash my eyes once more."

They washed his eyes with the milk once more.

"I see now as I did before!", cried the King.

That very hour a great feast began in the palace. The King summoned Teleyesh to sit at the head of the table on his right hand and the two other sons-in-law on the left. When all the courtiers gathered and the feast was in full swing, someone proposed that the old custom should be observed, and every honoured guest should tell a joke, a story, or some event from his own life. Everybody told what flashed through his mind.

When Teleyesh rose to speak, he began:

"Once upon a time there lived an old man who had three sons. One spring he sowed his whole field with maize. When the maize grew, high, a herd of horses came and trampled it. All the three sons watched the field. The youngest son caught a horse from that herd. When he let the horse go alive and free, it became a good friend to him for his whole life. The King of that country wished to marry off his youngest daughter. As he desired to have the best possible son-in-law, he placed his daughter in one of the palace towers. He built a marble staircase up to the balcony and made it known that the young man who would ride on horse back up to his daughter's balcony would have her as his bride. The youngest son rode up to the top of the tower then disappeared. The King's soldiers found him at home and took him to the palace. The King did not wish to have a simple country lad as son-in-law, and exiled him and his daughter to a distant cabin. Twice enemies invaded his kingdom, and twice thanks to the youngest son-in-law, they were defeated.

The King swore an oath not to visit the cabin, or if he did might he go blind. During the great victory feast he did not believe the Queen's words that she had seen his youngest son-in-law with the King's handkerchief round his arm, and going himself to look through the window of the cabin was struck blind. Neither the doctors' medicines nor the old women's herbs could cure him. Then, hearing it was possible to restore his sight with lioness' milk, he sent his sons-in-law to find some.

The two elder sons-in-law rode for a long time, and on their way they met an old man who was coming from afar with the milk to cure his wife's blindness. The princes asked him to give them a few drops for their King. The old man gave them milk from a cow not from the lioness.

"They agreed to his price,
And I tell you no lies,
For the marks of his brand
On their backs still stand!"

"Well, dear princes, show the traces of the brand," said Teleyesh to the two sons-in-law.

The sons-in-law showed their backs, and the people could read "Teleyesh" stamped there.

"If you were the brave warrior you have spoken about, dress yourself

and appear on horseback as you did before, so that we may believe your words," said the King.

Teleyesh summoned the magic horse Gaitan, and everybody saw him and believed him. The King then gave over his kingdom into his youngest son-in-law's hands.

From that day on Teleyesh took charge of the kingdom and ruled it for many years. Maybe he is still ruling it today, if he is still alive.

THE GREEN CASKET

t happened long, long ago, when the poplar trees bore pears and the willow yielded cherries, so that I ate my fill. At those times there lived a boy. He had served for a year, for two, for three... for seven, for nine, but got only food for that.

At last he served three days and got three nuts. Seeing that he could not put an end to hard life and misfortune, he went the wide world.

He walked and walked for a long time, passed through many empires, until he came to a spring. He stopped there to have a rest, drank some water, took out the nuts to eat them, but then he thought to himself.

"If I eat them, they'll be eaten, but if I plant them, three walnut trees will grow. Whoever will pass by, will sit in their shade, will eat nuts and will remember with good words the person who has planted them."

He planted the three nuts, watered them with spring water and went further. After some time he returned to those places and saw the walnut trees big. He stopped again to have a rest. While resting, he took his flask, filled it with spring water and raised it to drink.

"Master," he heard a voice from one of the trees, "give me a mouthful of water!"

John, so was the name of the boy, turned his head, but saw nobody.

"Look here, pour some water into this hollow in the trunk of the tree!"

He looked better and saw a hollow in the trunk of one of the trees. He poured all the water he had in the flask into it, and then he heard a crack and a whistle. The tree splitted into two halves and a big snake came out of it. The snake said:

"John, you deserve a great recompense for the good you have done to me."

"But I haven't done this for gifts."

"Come with me to my father, and he will ask what to recompense you with for the good done. You have to tell him that you want nothing but the green casket. He won't give it to you, until he puts you to test for three times. He will bring three fairies. They will look all alike. Their eyes, their eyebrows, their dresses, their kerchiefs, everything will be alike. He will ask you to show the eldest, the second and the youngest. Nobody has been able to guess up till now, as the three fairies look absolutely alike and are extremely beautiful."

"And how am I to guess?"

"Don't care about it! I shall turn into a fly and I shall sit on the forehead of the eldest one, on the nose of the second one and on the chin of the youngest one. In such a way you'll recognize them."

With these words the snake unfolded three rows of wings and said:

"Get on my back and I'll take you where we have to go, as it is far, very far indeed. It is so far that even the thought can't make its way there."

John mounted the snake, but this did not walk. He flew like a strong wind and so quickly that the air whistled behind them. They landed in front of a very beautiful palace, so beautiful that it was impossible to describe it.

The Emperor of the snakes was intoxicated with joy, when he saw that his son had come safe and sound. He opened the gate, laid the table, lit the torches and said:

"You are welcome to rich tables and delicious drinks!"

The Emperor of the snakes was overjoyed to see his son.

He thought that his beloved son had been lost in the world.

The snake said to his father:

"This lad has saved me. I sat in a tree planted by him and I satisfied my thirst with the water he had given to me to restore my strength."

"What am I to recompense your goodness with? Am I to give you gold, riches, what do you want?"

John answered:

"I want nothing but the green casket."

"If you have asked for it by your own will, it means that you are a clever chap. But if anybody advised you to, he wished you good. Now, if you want to get the green casket, you will have to guess which of the three fairies is the eldest, which is the second and which is the youngest."

The Emperor gave his order and three girls, three fairies came in. You wouldn't tell them from one another: the same height, each of them had two morning stars on the shoulders, the moon on the back, the sun on the bosom and the lap decorated with gold coins.

John looked at them for a long time but could not distinguish them. Then he noticed that a fly sat on the forehead of one of the fairies.

"This is the eldest one!"

"You have guessed."

The three fairies left the room and then came back, dressed in silver dresses. They were as beautiful as the sun at midday.

"Now you have to show me the second one," said the Emperor.

Again John could not guess. Well, soon the fly sat on the nose of one of the girls.

"This is the second fairy!"

"Right you are", said the Emperor.

The girls went and changed in other clothes. They came so beautifully dressed, that it was difficult to compare them with anything else. They all had ear-rings of snow drops, necklaces of lime blossoms and they all looked so alike!

"Now you have to guess which of them is the youngest fairy."

John looked in turn at them, but he saw the same faces, the same eyes, the same dresses, decorated with gold all over. One could have looked

at them for ages and still it was impossible to distinguish them. When the fly sat on the chin of the youngest fairy, John put his hand on her shoulder and said:

"Here she is, Emperor!"

"You have won the green casket!"

The three fairies from the empire of the snakes had each a casket. The eldest one had a red casket, which she kept in her room in the palace. The middle one had a white casket, while the youngest one had a green casket.

These were the fairies' dowries in the empire of the snakes.

The Emperor took the green casket from a shelf and gave it to John.

John thanked him and then asked:

"Well, how can I go back to the places I have come from?"

The old snake whistled once and a saddled, bridled ready for ride horse appeared.

"Take this horse! Give him a bushel of red-hot coals, but tell him to go neither to the left nor to the right. When you come to the border of my empire, put the bridle on his back and it will come home alone."

John fed the horse with red-hot coals and mounted it. The horse started to trot and neigh, sparkling with its hoofs. They did not cover a long distance, when all at once a she-dragon with wings and gold scales came out of a thick forest. She coiled herself around one of the hind legs of the horse, while half of her body was dragging on the ground.

John stood stone-still, when he saw that. He whipped the horse to trot faster and to get rid of the she-dragon, but she held herself with tooth and nail. Then John began to whip her, but the she-dragon spoke with a human voice.

"Don't strike me, brave young man, as your life is in my hands. If you let me live, you'll be all right. If you kill me, you'll get into great troubles."

The brave lad rode for a long time, came out of the thick forest and when he was at the border of the empire of the snakes, the horse told him:

"I can't take you further than the border."

And left him at half way.

The she-dragon uncoiled from the leg of the horse and told John:

"Don't be sad, as I shall be your guide from here on."

On went John with the green casket and accompanied by the she-dragon, until he came to a well with a gold kerb, with a silver shadoof, with a dip bucket made of pearls and two gold cups. One of the cups was full of water, and the other was empty.

Being hungry and thirsty John stopped near the well. He took some water, washed himself, then sat down to eat, drank a cup of cold water, began to doze and soon fell asleep.

The she-dragon turned overhead, left her snake skin, and became a

very beautiful girl, as beautiful as the sun when it rises and as an apple tree when it blossoms.

She rose John's head and put it on her arms so that he could sleep better.

John had been sleeping for some time, and when he awoke, he saw the girl and said:

"Oh, if I had such a fiancee, I should do everything possible for her!"

Hearing such words the girl said:

"Am I not chosen by you? I am the she-dragon who has come after the green casket step by step following your traces. You have asked to marry me out of the three sisters."

Then John got very excited and said:

"I am troubled and terrified when I see a frightful she-dragon. Everybody will run away from this skin."

"I am bewitched to wear it and I cannot leave it."

"If you are my foreordained wife, let it be as you say. We shall go further together as each of us is the minion of the other one."

They walked and walked until they came to the three walnut trees.

There they built up a hut and lived in it. During the night she was an extremely beautiful woman, while in the day-time she was a she-dragon.

John went to hunt in the forest, brought water from the well. Whenever he came to the hut, his heart filled with joy. The walls were decorated with precious stones, which shined so that the night turned into day. The table and the chairs were gilded, the beds were covered with imperial bed spreads, and everything was from the green casket. The only sorrow John had was the fact that in the daytime his wife turned into a she-dragon.

One day he told her:

"My dear wife, would you bake me some flat cakes, I shall go to the fair to buy a ewe-lamb and a heifer to have some animals at our hut."

When she heard it, she took off her skin and began to make flat cakes. She kneaded the dough, lit the fire in the oven, and when the flat cakes were baked, he took some of them and went off.

He paid some gold and some precious stones and bought a ewe-lamb and a heifer at the fair. Well, what happened next?!

Again John told his wife to bake some flat cakes, as he wanted to go to another fair to buy some more things for the house.

His wife quickly took off the snake skin, lit the fire in the oven, took the pails and went to bring some water.

John remained alone in the hut and what do you think he did? He seized the snake skin and threw it into the fire.

"She will not have what to put on any more and she'll remain a beautiful woman for ever."

She felt the smell of the skin, came running to him and said:

"Poor me, if you have done it yourself, you have judged badly. If anyone has taught you to do so, then he has not been favourable to you. I needed only three days more to get rid of the curse. Two dragons from the empire of the snakes had to come and take the skin. But now they'll come to take me back into the empire of the snakes."

From that moment she remained a beautiful woman, but very gloomy and sad.

The smoke of the burnt skin reached even the empire of the snakes. And, when the old mother snake, the Empress of all the snakes and dragons, found out that a snake skin had been burnt in the fire, she sent two dragons with wings and gold scales to take the fairy back to their empire.

The two dragons came in the air as the wind, on the land as the thought. When they approached the hut they said:

"We were ordered to take the fairy to the empire of the snakes!"

The beautiful fairy brooded on the situation and said to John:

"Go quickly out and give them the ewe-lamb and tell them:

"Here is the girl I took from the empire of the snakes!"

John went out of the hut and looked for the ewe-lamb in the near water meadow, then in the grove among other sheep and brought it to them.

The dragons took it, without saying a word, and set out, passing deep valleys, cold springs until they came to the border of their empire. A cuckoo was singing there in a grove, telling them:

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! The dragons have taken a ewe-lamb, leaving the girl!"

Hearing it, the two dragons ate the sheep and returned head over heels to the hut.

"John, give us the girl, otherwise we shall eat you, as we have eaten the sheep."

The beautiful girl told John:

"Go quickly and give them the heifer to get rid of them."

The two dragons took the heifer and set out. Again they heard the cuckoo singing at the border of the empire:

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! The dragons have taken the heifer and have left the girl."

The dragons did not pay any attention to the singing of the cuckoo, but went further to the palace of the snakes.

The old she-dragon, the Empress of the snakes, was ready to kill them, when she saw the heifer.

"Away from here! I don't want to see even your traces in this yard! You are good for nothing! Instead of the fairy you have brought me a heifer!"

She looked at them so fiercely, that they ran away into the thickness of a forest of fear.

Then she addressed the Emperor, held a council with him and decided that the Emperor himself would go to bring the fairy together with the green casket.

The Emperor put the saddle on a light bay horse, mounted it and went through forests flying as the wind and shaking the earth.

When he was near the hut, the fairy said:

"Go out, John, and look what is there."

John looked out and said:

"I see a darkness from the earth high up to the sky."

"This is not a darkness. This is the Emperor. He is coming to take me. But don't be afraid. I shall turn into a vineyard with berries as big as the cup, while you will be turned into a wine grower. When he asks you if you haven't seen a lad and a girl, tell him that you saw them passing by, when you were planting the vineyard."

In a twinkle of an eye the girl turned into a vineyard, with rows of beautiful bushes. She turned John into a wine grower with a white beard.

The Emperor came up to him, stopped his horse, greeted him and asked:

"Old man, haven't you seen a lad and a girl?"

"I saw them. Your Highness, they passed by in my youth, when I was planting the vineyard."

Hearing that, the Emperor returned home and told the Empress:

"While travelling I met nobody except an old wine grower, who was working in his vineyard. He told me that he had seen them passing, when he had been young."

"Oh, Emperor, they were there. They had turned into a vineyard and a wine maker, so that you would not recognize them. Go back and bring them by all means."

The Emperor of the snakes went back and covered a long distance through thick forests and deserts. When he was near their place, the girl said:

"John, have a look, why is it so thundering?!"

He looked out and answered:

"A rain cloud is being raised by the wind."

Then the girl said:

"It's not a cloud, but the Emperor. He is coming to take us. Don't be afraid: I shall turn myself into a bee garden and you into an old bee keeper. When the Emperor asks if you haven't seen a lad and a girl, you will have to tell him that you haven't but your grandfather, who lived a hundred years, said that he had seen them when he had been a child."

In a trice they turned into a bee garden and an old bee keeper.

Shortly after that the Emperor came up to the bee garden and asked:
"Haven't you seen a lad and a girl passing by your bee garden?"
The bee keeper answered:
"I have seen nobody to pass by, but my grandfather, who lived a hundred years, told me that he had seen them in his childhood."
The Emperor did not venture to go further. He went back and told the Empress so and so, that he had seen that and that, and had heard that and that.
"Poor me, Emperor, they were there! You have travelled so far without any use. Stay at home now. I shall go myself."
The Empress of the snakes mounted a mortar and set out on a long journey like a whirlwind, thundering and pouring fire out of her mouth.
At last she came to the places where the lad and the girl lived. John felt the fire and told the fairy about it. The girl knew that it was the Empress, as she was wonder-making, and told the lad:
"It seems that something is heating me too. Look behind us!"
"I see a green flame from the very sky to the earth behind us."
"This is the Empress, the old she-dragon. She is comming to take us. Now our lives hang by a thread. If you don't follow my advice, we shall not escape her curse. She is going to take us into the empire of the snakes and put dragon skins on us. If you want to be saved, listen to what I say. I shall turn into a lake, while you'll be turned into a swan, swimming in the water. You will have to swim where the water is deeper and avoid looking into her eyes, otherwise she'll steal your eyes."
When the fairy finished her words, she turned into a great lake. The lad became a swan, which swam where the water was deeper.
The Empress of the snakes came to the shore of the lake and cried:
"Come here, you the youngest fairy with the green casket!"
She thought that the fairy was swimming in the water.
The old she-dragon did her best to take the eyes of the swan, but she could not. The swan swam where the water was deeper and did not turn the head.
At last the Empress of the snakes decided to return home. At that moment John looked at her with one eye and the old she-dragon took it at once.
Leaving that place, she said:
"You may remain blind, fairy!"
After the she-dragon left, the lake and the swan became again a fairy and a lad. But the lad had only one eye now. The fairy scolded him:
"I've told you not to look at her, it could have been much worse for both of us. But never mind! Be quiet and don't trouble! I'll go and waylay her."
Then the fairy set out in a hurry. She outstripped the she-dragon and turned into a well with cold water, with a tree near it, and with silky

green grass all around. It was a real pleasure to sit and have a rest there.

When the old she-dragon came to the well, she drank some water, hid the eye under her tongue, and, tired as she was, lay in the shade of the tree and fell asleep.

The fairy turned back into a girl, took slowly John's eye out of her mouth, put a frog instead of it and off she was.

When the she-dragon awoke, she saw neither the well nor the tree.

She went further, got to the palace and cried from afar:

"I've got the fairy's eye!"

"It's impossible," the Emperor cried in answer.

The she-dragon opened her mouth to show the eye, but the frog jumped out of it. She guessed that the fairy had taken her in, but it could not be helped, as she did not know where the girl was. The three days of spell had passed, and its term had expired.

The fairy gave the eye back to John, then they went to celebrate their wedding. They had a very beautiful marriage party and lived a happy life ever since. Maybe they are still alive, if they haven't died.

DRAGAN-THE-BOLD

Long ago there lived an old woman who had three sons. They grew as much in a day as other children did in a year. When the eldest son went out of the house for the first time, he saw a frog and began to chase it. The frog ran all round the earth and then leapt into the air. The boy jumped into the sky after it.

The middle son saw a duck, when he went out of the house for the first time. He started to chase it through meadows and forests, and among the clouds, when it flew into the sky.

The youngest son saw a squirrel, when he left the house. As soon as he saw it he began to chase it.

The squirrel jumped from tree to tree, then to the moon, and from the moon to the sun. All the three sons were chasing their prey but they knew nothing of each other.

In the kingdom where the old woman lived, the King had three daughters. One afternoon a dark cloud appeared, the rain fell in buckets-full, and then three dragons appeared from the nether world. They seized the King's daughters and stole the sun, the moon and the stars from the sky and carried them off below.

A great darkness fell on the whole kingdom. When the King saw such darkness he said:

"If there is anybody bold enough to bring back my daughters and to put back the sun, moon and stars in the sky, I'll give him half of my kingdom."

When the old woman heard of the King's words she went to the palace.

"Your Illustrious Highness," she said, "give me three pails of wine and some red tiles to cover my roof, and I shall bring you back your daughters, and put back the sun, moon and stars in the sky."

The King was overjoyed:

"Old woman, I shall give you much more than that if you do as you say."

"If I say so, it will be so," answered the old woman.

"Very well, but if you don't do what you have said, I'll cut off your head," said the King. Then he ordered his servants to give her three pails of old wine and some red tiles to cover the roof.

The old woman roofed the house with the tiles and they were so red, that they seemed to be burning. After that she sat down and began to wait.

When the eldest boy passed by in the sky chasing the frog, he looked down and got a fright. He said to himself:

"The frog can go to the Devil! My mother's house is burning!"

He flew down as quick as lightning to his mother's house and saw that it was not burning, but only roofed with red tiles.

"Oh, mother, what have you done? Because of you I have let my prey escape."

"Never mind, my dear son, I missed you and I simply wanted to see you. Come with me and I'll give you a glass of wine, because you are tired."

She brought a bucket of old wine and gave him. He drank it dry and went to sleep beside the stove.

Shortly after that the middle son, who was chasing the duck, passed by in the sky. When he looked down and saw the red tiles on the house, it seemed to him that it was burning, and he said to himself:

"The duck can go to the Devil! My mother's house is burning!"

The middle son flew down as well, but when he saw the red tiles he said:

"Oh, mother, what have you done? Because of you I have let my prey escape!"

"Never mind, my dear son, I missed you and I simply wanted to see you."

She gave him a bucket of wine and he went to sleep beside the stove.

The old woman still waited for Dragan, her youngest son. Some time later, he passed by with his bow and arrow chasing the squirrel. When he looked down and saw his mother's house he got a fright and said to

himself:

"The squirrel can go to the Devil! My mother's house is burning!"

When he flew down and saw the red tiles he said to his mother:

"Oh, mother, what have you done? Because of you I have let my prey escape."

"Never mind, my dear son. I simply missed you and wanted to see you."

She gave Dragan a bucket of old wine, and he also went to sleep beside the stove.

Then they all woke at the same time. So much time passed since they had parted that their voices had changed, and they had grown into men. Now they did not recognize each other in the darkness and asked:

"What are you doing in my mother's house?"

"And what are you, if it comes to that?"

And they began to quarrel and fight.

Their mother stepped between them and said:

"Stop fighting! You are all brothers!"

"Are we brothers?"

"Well, you are the eldest, you are the middle one, and you are the youngest."

"And why did you want to see us, mother?"

"I wanted to see you, because I have agreed with the King to bring back his three daughters, and the sun, moon and stars from the sky all stolen by three dragons. If I don't do so, he'll cut off my head."

The two elder brothers were horrified.

"What have you done, mother?"

Then Dragan spoke:

"Mother, you have given us a most difficult task, but none of us will lose his head. Go to the King and ask him to give you twelve hundredweights of the best silk."

The old woman went to the King and brought back twelve hundredweights of the very best silk, and the brothers made it into a rope. From the silk which remained they made a cradle big enough for them to sit in.

Then they all sat down at table and began to eat and drink. After that they said:

"Good-bye, dear mother. Keep well! We are off now!"

So they set out and walked from village to village, up hill and down dale, through forest and vale, until the day's close they followed their nose for three years running until they came to the centre of the earth. There they found a deep hole which led to the nether world.

The eldest brother said:

"Now let us decide what to do next."

"You are the eldest brother and you have the right to go down first," said the other younger brothers, and got the rope and the cradle ready.

The eldest brother sat into the cradle, and gripping the rope with his hands, said:

"Let down the rope, but when I tug on it pull me out."

The eldest brother went down about forty fathoms, then he tugged on the rope and they pulled him out.

"What happened, brother?"

"I couldn't go further, because of the hissing of snakes, the croaking of toads and the coldness of the earth."

The middle brother got into the cradle, and went down about one hundred fathoms. Then he tugged on the rope, and they pulled him out as well.

"What happened there, brother?"

"Oh, it was terrible! I couldn't go further, because of the hissing of snakes, the croaking of toads and the coldness of the earth."

Then came Dragan's turn to go down. What did he tell them?

"Well, brothers. I shall go down, but when I tug on the rope, let me go down further. When I stop tugging you stop letting the rope go down and wait until I come and tug it again for you to pull me out."

Dragan got into the cradle, gripped the rope and began to tug now and again, while his brothers let it go down and down. As he went down the snakes got scared and stopped hissing, the toads hid themselves and stopped croaking, and steam came out of the earth for his heart beat so bravely.

He kept on tugging now and again on the rope until he reached the bottom. There he saw forests, hills and fields just as on our earth. Dragan-the-Bold turned head over heels and became a bumble-bee and flew through forests, through deserts and through groves until he came to a little hut. There lived Scorpion, the mother of the three dragons, who had stolen the sun, moon, and stars from the sky and the King's three daughters.

The bumble-bee flew into the hut, hid behind a beam, and began to listen. The old witch was sitting with her three daughters-in-law and was asking them:

"How strong is your husband, the dragon?"

The eldest answered:

"Well, when he comes home at the end of the day and reaches the copper bridge, his horse breathes a twelve-mile-long flame from his nostrils, and I must be ready with twelve roasted oxen, twelve ovens full of baked bread, and twelve casks of wine for his supper.

"And what about yours, how strong is he?" she asked her middle daughter-in-law.

"Mine," said the middle one, "when he comes home from hunting and reaches the silver bridge, his horse breathes a twenty-four-mile-long

flame from his nostrils. My husband hurls his mace, and it flies round the hut three times, and then I must be ready with twenty four roasted oxen, and twenty four casks of wine for his supper."

"And yours, how strong is he?", she asked the youngest daughter-in-law.

"When he reaches the golden bridge, his horse breathes a fifty-mile-long flame from his nostrils. My husband hurls his mace, and it flies three times round the hut and then I must be ready with a glass of water and a crust of bread for his supper."

Having heard all this, Dragan flew out from behind the beam. The old witch Scorpion said:

"Did you hear the bumble-bee which just flew out?"

"Yes, we did."

"That was Dragan-the-Bold. It is written in old books that he will fight the three dragons and will conquer them."

When Dragan-the-Bold heard his name he returned and settled under the overhanging eaves of the hut.

The old witch's eldest daughter-in-law then said:

"I shall kill Dragan!"

"How will you kill him?"

"I shall turn into a well with two golden glasses, one to go into the well, the other to come out of it. Then, I shall make him very thirsty. When he tastes the water he will die."

"Oh," said the old witch, "do you think that he doesn't know how to slash right and left with his sword and to go on further?"

Then the middle one said:

"Then I shall kill him."

"And what will you do?"

"I shall turn into an apple tree with royal apples on its boughs and green grass at its foot. I shall put him into a deep sleep, and when he sits down in the shade to take a rest on the grass, he'll take one bite of an apple and die."

"And do you think that he doesn't know how to slash the tree with his sword and go on further."

"Then I shall burn him alive," said the youngest daughter-in-law.

"And how will you do that?"

"I shall turn into a fire from one end of the earth to the other, and when he comes I shall burn him to ashes."

"And do you think," said the old witch, "that he doesn't know how to slash left and right and go further. Only I know how to get rid of him."

"And how will you do that?"

"I shall open my mouth so wide, from the earth to the sky. I shall catch him and swallow him and I shan't let him out till he's dead."

together. As Dragan squeezed the dragon's paw, blood flowed out between his claws.

"Since you have paid me a visit, let us eat and drink first," said the dragon.

"The table is ready and waiting," answered Dragan.

"Let us eat, and as soon as one of us gnaws the meat from a bone, he must strike the other one with the bare bone on his forehead."

Such was the custom among the dragons.

The dragon sat down to table, took the leg of an ox, gulped down the meat, and when he struck Dragan with the bare bone, he saw hundreds of stars. Dragan gnawed the meat from a bone as well, and when he struck the dragon on the forehead, he sank into the earth up to his neck, and if Dragan hadn't caught him by ears, he would have disappeared completely. Then Dragan drew his sword and cut off the dragon's head. The servant was very glad and cried:

"How can I ever thank you? You have saved me from the slavery of the dragon!"

"From now on," said Dragan, "you will be the master here."

When the head of the dragon fell, the morning and the evening star fell out of his bosom. Dragan put them into his pocket, said farewell to the servant and went on further.

He went through forests, through fields, and through deserts until he came to a silver bridge. When he was about to cross the bridge, a servant who was driving a herd of horses to pasture, met him.

"Where are you going, brave fellow?"

"I'm going to see the dragon."

"Stop a moment! The dragon said that if anybody wanted to visit him he must first mount a steed and gallop round the earth three times."

In that herd there was a ninety-nine year old steed, with ninety-nine hearts. Dragan seized it by the mane, and when he mounted it, the horse's hooves sank into the earth.

"How do you want me to carry you, bold fellow? As swift as the wind or as quick as thought?"

"If we go as quick as thought, we shall both die. Let's go as swift as the wind, and against the light."

The steed galloped off so swiftly that he left a furrow behind him. Dragan encircled the earth three times, and when he came back the spume was simply dripping from the steed. When the horse neighed the dragon appeared.

When the dragon was about to cross the bridge, his horse fell on both knees. The dragon roared:

"Get up, you jade! May the ravens eat you! There is nothing to fear, Dragan is not here. I have heard about him, but I'll bite his head off, be-

Having heard everything they had said in the hut, Dragan came out from under the overhanging eaves and flew away like any bumble-bee does.

"Did you hear him? That was Dragan-the-Bold!"

Dragan turned head over heels, stood on his legs again and walked for a long while, over field, over stile until he came to a grazing ground. There he saw a cowherd with a herd of oxen. Dragan asked him:

"Good man, have you seen or heard of the copper bridge, where the dragon passes by on horseback?"

"Just a moment, brave fellow, I shall show you where it is. The dragon has stood me here, and told me that if anybody wanted to go to the copper bridge, he must first eat twenty-four roasted oxen, twenty four ovens full of bread, and drink twenty four casks of wine."

When Dragan heard these words he said:

"Prepare them and give them to me."

When the food and drink were all ready, the dragon came and offered Dragan his paw. As the dragon squeezed Dragan's hand, his fingers stuck

cause he has cut off the head of one of my brothers."

"Roar, you beastly dragon! Here I am!"

The dragon unsheathed his sword, and cried:

"Let's fight!"

"How do you fight?"

"Either with swords or with guns."

Dragan answered:

"The sword is for lords, the gun is for Huns. Let us wrestle it is much fairer."

So they began to wrestle. First Dragan overcame the dragon, then the dragon overcame Dragan. Finally Dragan lifted the dragon and hurled him to the ground, and he sank up to his neck in the earth, and if Dragan had not seized him by his ears, he would have disappeared completely. Then he cut off the dragon's head, and the moon fell out of his bosom and rolled down on the grass. Dragan took the moon and put it into his pocket with the morning and the evening star.

The servant was very glad and cried:

"How can I ever thank you? You have saved me from the slavery of the dragon. All my life I have had to look after the horses and fulfil the beastly dragon's orders."

"From now on, you are the master here. Live as you think best."

Dragan-the-Bold went on further. He walked and walked until he came to a golden bridge.

The dragon's servant came to meet him.

"Stop, brave fellow. The dragon has set me on guard here! If anybody wishes to cross, he must eat a full sieve of blackthorn berries."

"Very well, bring them here!"

Before the servant had picked the berries, the dragon came thundering out of the forest on his horse. As he started to cross the bridge it shook beneath his horse's feet, but when he came up to the middle of the bridge, his horse stumbled, and the dragon roared:

"Get up, you bag of grass, may the dogs eat you! I am afraid of nobody, except Dragan, and he's not here."

"I am here, and I am ready to fight with you," cried Dragan.

"Since you have paid me a visit, let us eat first," said the dragon. They sat down at the table full of blackthorn berries, but while the dragon ate one handful, Dragan ate two. When they had finished the berries the dragon said:

"Let's fight!"

Dragan rushed at him with his naked sword, but he did not manage to wound the dragon, since he was very agile and had a sharp sword too. They fought and fought for a long time, but neither gained the mastery. Then they turned into two rams. One of them stood on one hill, the other on an-

other, and when they butted each other the very earth shook. The longer they fought, the stronger and sharper their horns became.

"Have you had enough?"

"Yes, let's have a rest."

Dragan turned back into a warrior with his sword and sat down on the green grass. The dragon turned into a griffin with six heads. While three heads were sleeping the other three were on guard and so on in turn. In this way the dragon took a rest. Dragan-the-Bold watched the griffin carefully, and just when three of the heads were falling asleep, and the other three were waking up, he rushed at him with his sword and cut off all the heads at once, both sleeping and awake.

As he did so, the sun fell from the dragon's breast and rolled down on the grass. Dragan took it and put it into his pocket with the moon and the stars.

Then he crossed the bridge. The servant was very glad and said:

"How can I ever thank you that you have saved me from the slavery of the dragon."

Dragan went on his way still further. He walked and walked over moor and fen, through forest and glen, until he came to a well with a white marble brim, full of clear water. Dragan felt such a thirst that his tongue stuck to his teeth. But when he bent to drink he remembered the old witch's words, and slashed the brim right and left with his sword. Blood began to run from the slashes, and he went on further.

He walked for some while until he came to an apple tree with beautiful royal apples and green grass below. Dragan felt so sleepy that he stumbled on the path, and almost fell. He was just going to take a bite from an apple and lay beneath the shade of the tree on the green grass to sleep, when he remembered the old witch's words. He slashed the apple tree with his sword, the trunk began to ooze blood, and he went on further.

As he went walking on, he almost fell into a fire which was raging on every side, he unsheathed his sword and when he thrust it into the fire, blood began to flow.

Dragan-the-Bold went on further, but all at once he felt that something was hot on his back. That was the breath of the old witch Scorpion who was coming after him with her mouth wide open from the earth to the sky. What did Dragan do? He hastened on ahead of the witch and then remembered that his mother had a brother in the nether world, whose name was Kozma Dimir. He decided to find him, and walked quicker and quicker so that the old witch should not catch up with him.

Kozma Dimir had a smithy in the nether world and when he heard that his nephew was coming, he opened his smithy and stood waiting for him. As Dragan stepped into the smithy the old witch caught him by the foot and tore some flesh away. From that time on man has a hollow instep.

Dragan just managed to get inside the smithy, and Kozma Dimir slammed the door, then he locked it and said to the old witch:

"If you haven't eaten him before this, you won't eat him now!"

"All the same I shall eat him!"

"Certainly, you won't!"

The old witch was furious. She turned head over heels and appeared with four heads. She put two of them by one of the doorposts and two by the other, so as to eat Dragan, when he came out.

Dragan told Kozma Dimir inside the smithy:

"Uncle, make me an iron mace weighing nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine pounds."

Kozma Dimir had twelve blacksmiths who worked with him in the smithy. They put the iron into the fire, hammered it on the anvil and made a mace.

When the old witch saw that Dragan was not going to come out, she said:

"Oh, Kozma Dimir, you are a great craftsman, I shall give you all the treasures on earth, only make me a little hole, just to look with one eye, to see what Dragan-the-Bold is doing. He has killed my three sons, as handsome as three fir trees, and my three daughters-in-law, as beautiful as three flowers, and has stolen the sun, moon and stars of the sky from them.

Kozma Dimir made a little hole, and she looked in with one eye.

"How handsome and bold Dragan is! Kozma Dimir, I'll give you whatever you wish, only make the hole a little larger, so that I may see him with my both eyes."

He made the hole a little larger, and the old witch looked in with both eyes.

"Ah, I see better now how handsome and stately Dragan looks! Kozma Dimir, I'll give you all the wealth in the world, only make the hole a little larger, so that I can put in my head to see him better from head to foot."

Kozma Dimir made the hole in the wall a little larger still, but put the mace into the fire as well. When the hole was ready, the mace was red-hot. The old witch Scorpion put her head in and opened her mouth to swallow Dragan. Kozma Dimir rushed up with the twelve blacksmiths and seized her. Six of them held her, while the other six struck her with the red-hot mace. They beat and beat her into little bits, burnt her in the fire, scattered her ashes to the four winds, and it disappeared into the ground.

Then Dragan said farewell to them all and off he went. He walked for some time and then he saw a copper orchard.

That orchard was looked after by the King's eldest daughter, who had been brought there by the dragons.

Dragan said to himself:

"Well, why do I walk like a woman? Let me walk like a man!"

Then he struck the earth with his club, and the fruit began to fall to the ground. The princess appeared and said:

"Hallo there, brother, why are you shaking down all my fruit?"

"Hallo there, sister, don't grumble, but give me a glass of water to drink and a slice of bread to eat."

"Come in, you are welcome!"

Dragan entered the house, the princess gave him a glass of water and a slice of bread, and then he said to her:

"Do you know what?"

"What?"

"I have called you sister and you have called me brother. So now you will be my eldest brother's wife."

His brothers, you remember, were waiting for him by the hole with the silk cradle and the rope.

Well, Dragan went on further, until he came to a silver orchard kept by the King's middle daughter, Dragan walked through the orchard and said to himself:

"But why am I walking like a woman? Let me walk like a man!"

And when he struck the earth with his club, the fruit began to fall to the ground. The princess appeared and said:

"Hello there, brother, what are you doing there? It would be better for you to come in for three days and three nights and let me feed you with food, and give you good beer, instead of doing such damage."

"Very well, sister, but just give me a glass of water and a slice of bread to eat."

The princess gave him something to eat and drink, and then asked him:

"What shall we do now?"

"You have called me brother and I have called you sister. So now you will be my middle brother's wife."

Then Dragan went on further until he came to a golden orchard kept by the King's youngest daughter. Dragan walked like a man for some time in the orchard, and then he struck the earth with his club, and the fruit began to fall.

The youngest princess appeared.

"Oh, my dear, it would have been better if you had come with a whole army to be fed instead of causing me such a great loss."

"Never mind, my dear, don't be sad. Give me a glass of water to drink and a slice of bread to eat."

"Come in, you are welcome!"

She gave him something to eat and drink and then asked:

"What shall we do now?"

"You have called me your dear, and I have called you my dear. That

means that we shall be husband and wife."

Dragan struck the earth with his club three times, and turned all the princess' wealth into three golden apples, put them into his pocket, took the princess with him and went to the other two sisters. When they came to the silver orchard, he strick the earth with his club three times and the second princess' wealth turned into three silver apples. The wealth of the princess with the copper orchard was turned into three copper apples.

Then he went with the three princesses to the bottom of the hole, which led back to our earth. When they arrived there, he put the eldest daughter into the cradle and told her:

"When you get out, you must tell them that you are the wife of the eldest brother."

When she came out the two brothers asked her:

"Who are you?"

"I am the wife of the eldest brother."

The eldest brother was amazed.

"Just look! Our youngest brother has sent me a wife."

They lowered the cradle again, and the middle girl got into it.

"You must tell them that you are the wife of the middle brother," Dragan told her.

When she came out of the hole they asked her:

"Whose bride are you?"

"I am the bride of the middle brother."

When the cradle came down for the third time, the youngest princess said:

"You get into it first, Dragan, as you'll be able to pull me up out of here, but I shall not be able to pull you up!"

"No, no, you get in first! My brothers have wives already and will take me out as well."

"Very well. All the same, you must not get into the cradle when they let it down. First put a stone into it. If they pull out the stone, they will pull you out too. I shall tell them that the stone will be useful for all of us."

When they lowed the cradle to pull Dragan out, the eldest brother said:

"Listen, if we pull him out he'll come with the dragons' treasures and will be richer than us, and everybody will say that he has done a great deed and that he has rescued the King's daughters. And so they put heads together.

"Let us cut the rope so that he falls down. He'll die there, and we shall just say that the rope broke."

The King's daughters heard nothing what they had decided.

Dragan put a stone as heavy as a man into the cradle and placed his hat on it. When the two brothers caught sight of the hat, they cut the rope through. The stone fell down and was turned into dust, so deep was the hole.

"Just see what my brothers have done! Now I shall never get out of here."

Then he decided to go back to Kozma Dimir and when he reached the smithy, he told him everything that had happened. He also asked him how he could get out of the nether world.

Kozma Dimir told him:

"You must go to the Apple-tree of Life on grandfather Valerian's estate on Midsummer day. On that day the Apple-tree of Life rises out of the nether world up into the realm of life for o short while and then returns below. If you meet grandfather Valerian and he wants to shake hands with you, instead of holding out your hand, hold out this ploughshare."

Kozma Dimir gave Dragan a ploughshare which he had forged in his smithy. Dragan thanked his uncle, took the ploughshare and went on his way. He walked all night and he walked all day, and many a wonder he saw on the way. But words are short and the road is long, and this tale is long too, so he mustn't go wrong. At last he came to an Apple-tree with golden branches, whose crown touched the sky. From behind the tree came grandfather Valerian's servant-girl driving a glass cart, pulled by a tomcat and a rooster. Dragan asked her:

"Where are you going dear girl, with such a cart?"

"I am carrying apples to grandfather Valerian."

Dragan burst out laughing.

"Jump up, brave lad, for a ride!"

Dragan got up into the cart and the girl cried:

"Gee-up Tommy dear, gee-up Chanticleer!"

The tomcat and the rooster simply flew along, and in two ticks took them to grandfather Valerian, who had lived one hundred years as a man and one hundred years as a seven year old child and was still alive.

"How are you getting on, grandfather Valerian?"

"Near my end, Dragan. You have killed my three sons-in-law who were like three fir trees, my three daughters who were like three flowers, and the mother of my sons-in-law. Give me your hand to know how long I have still to live, and to know that I have shaken hands with a brave man."

When grandfather Valerian streched out his hand, Dragan held out the ploughshare, with which the earth is ploughed, and when the old man squeezed it in his hand, the iron cut through his fingers, and three drops of blood dripped down. Where they touched the ground three tongues of flame appeared, which enveloped grandfather Valerian and turned him into the flower which bears his name, and can be seen till this very day.

The servant-girl was very glad.

"What can I do for you, brave young man, since you have saved me from slavery?"

"Take me back to the Apple-tree of Life so as to be there by Midsummer day."

The girl called to the tomcat and to the rooster in the same way:

"Gee-up Tommy dear, gee-up Chanticleer, and carry Dragan to the Apple-tree of Life by Midsummer day!"

When they got there Dragan laid down under the Apple-tree of Life on the green grass, and sleep overcame him. He slept such a deep sleep that he did not feel how the Apple-tree rose up to the surface of the realm of life.

When he awoke he found himself in the living world again. Dragan got up quickly and set out. He made some thirty steps, and when he looked back he did not see the Apple-tree any more. The Apple-tree of Life had returned to the nether world.

Dragan-the-Bold went straight to the King.

"Your Illustrious Highness," he said, "I have come to ask you to grant me your daughter's hand in marriage since I have saved her from the dragons."

"If it is you who have saved her, then you must prove it."

Dragan took out the sun and the moon and the morning and evening stars from his pocket, and the whole kingdom became bright with daylight.

"Yes, I see, it is true! You have slain the dragons, you have brought back the sun, the moon, and the morning and evening stars but you haven't brought back my daughters, and I cannot give you my blessing!"

"Your Illustrious Highness, I shall go at once to my brothers and to my mother. If the princesses are not there, I don't know where I can find them."

With no further words Dragan set off to meet his brothers. On his way home he met a boy who was driving a herd of pigs to pasture.

"Well, my boy, whose son are you?"

"Oh, traveller, I should like to tell you whose son I am, but maybe you have never heard of him."

"And what is his name?"

"He is called Dragan-the-Bold."

"And where is your father?"

"He remained in the nether world."

"Is there any hope that he will return?"

"No, he won't come back from there!"

That was really Dragan's son. While Dragan was wandering in the nether world the boy had been born, grew up, and was now taking the pigs to pasture.

"And whose pigs are these, my dear lad?"

"They belong to Dragan's elder brothers."

"Do they give you food for taking their pigs to pasture?"

"Just look at me! In the evening, when I come my masters throw me a piece of maize porridge, if I catch it quickly I eat it, but if the dogs jump up before me they eat it, and I remain hungry!"

"And where is your mother?"
"She is a servant in my masters' house."
"I see. Well, take the pigs home now."
"Oh, I am afraid to. There is still some time to go till evening."
"Don't be afraid, I shall go with you."
The boy went and drove the pigs home, and when the masters saw him, they came out to meet him.
"Why have you come back. The sun is still high in the sky!" and they raised their whips to beat him.
"Stop! Don't you dare to touch him!" cried Dragan. "Now, my brothers, do you know me or do you not?"
What did Dragan-the-Bold do next? He gathered many people together, took counsel with them and said:
"Judge for yourselves what punishment my brothers deserve. Listen what they have done to me, and what I have suffered from them."
Some of them said death at the stake, some said exile, some said prison.
Dragan asked them to bring two wild horses. He tied them to the tails of the horses, and then whipped them up, and off they flew. Where a leg fell — a spring burst forth, where an arm fell — a well was found, where a body fell — a valley appeared, and where a head rolled — the green grass grew.
Dragan remained with the King's youngest daughter and celebrated a wedding party which lasted for three days and three nights running. After the wedding he was crowned King, and he is still ruling to this day.

And now as dry as a straw I stand,
For I've told the tale to the very end.

ALISTAR

ong, long ago in a distant village there lived an old man and an old woman. They were so old that they did not even remember their age. Their only hope and support at that time was their son Alistar. When the old people felt their end was approaching they called their son and told him: "Alistar dear, when we are gone, look for a green stem of basil in the bunch of herbs hanging on the beam, and smell it three times."

"Very well, dear father and mother", said Alistar, and after he had buried his parents with great grief and sorrow, he came home and looked for the green stem of basil in the bunch of herbs. He found a very tiny

flowering stem as thin as a needle, but when he smelt it once he felt his strength grew three times over. He smelt it the second time his strength again grew three times more. When he smelt it for the third time the blood in his viens suddenly changed, so that he could turn into any living thing he thought of.

Alistar worked his fingers to the bone, but still remained as poor as a church mouse. One day he decided to go into the wide world to try his fortune.

He walked and walked until he came to fine large wooden dwellings. How was he to know what and whose they were? Glad that he had had at last come to a fine house, he knocked on the gate which was opened by a terribly ugly dragon.

"How do you do," said the traveller.

"Good day to you", replied the dragon.

"Have you any work for me on your estate?" asked Alistar.

"Yes", said the dragon, "We badly need a servant just now. Come in."

Alistar entered the yard and saw many barns, and sheds, and stables just as you would expect on a rich landlord's estate. The dragon began to tell him what his duties were, but was wishing to himself that the night would come quicker, so that he could kill and eat him. Alistar worked and worked until twilight fell. The dragon's son came home from the fields and after they all had their supper they went to bed. The dragon made a bed in one corner of the veranda for his son, covered him with a red blanket and put a lighted candle by him. For Alistar he made the bed in the other corner of the veranda, and covered him with a black blanket, but did not light any candle for him. Alistar thought to himself: "What is this ugly dragon going to do? He is not doing all this for nothing." Alistar lay there thinking, while the dragons, as soon as they went to bed, began to snore so that the windows began to shake. The brave lad turned first on one side, and then on the other, but could get no rest. At last he decided: "I shall change places with the dragon's son." He got up, went to the other corner of the veranda, took the dragon's son lightly in his arms so that he did not feel anything, and put him in the other corner, and covered him with the black blanket. Then he covered himself with the red blanket and went to sleep where the dragon's son had been.

The moon hid its silver face behind the peaks of the hills as if it wanted to help the dragon to sleep more soundly. When the moon had quite disappeared behind the hills, the old dragon got up, took a heavy dagger in his hand and went on to the veranda into the corner, where Alistar had been put to sleep, raised the dagger and plunged it into the sleeper's throat, not knowing that he had slain his son. How was he to know since it was so dark? Then the old dragon lit a fire in the oven and piled on the logs so as to roast his prey before daybreak. Alistar was dumbfounded when he thought

what his fate might have been. He jumped out of bed, dressed, took the candle and tried to blow it out, but blow as he might, it went on burning. Then he tried to throw it on the ground but could not. It stuck to his fingers and went on burning brightly. Seeing this he ran off as quickly as he could. He ran and ran, but still the candle burnt and lighted his way. When the dragon looked out of the window, he saw no falling star in the night, but a running candle burning bright and he angrily cried:

"Candle mine, candle mine,
In the distance do not shine,
Come back home, that would be best,
And light the table for my guest."

But the candle ran on further and further. Then the old dragon called to his son as loud as he could:

"Hey, there you, my dragon son,
With your sleeping now have done!
After our candle run, run, run,
Bring it back, it's our only one!"

But how could his son answer him if he was killed? The dragon looked for him in the house, called him and called, but all in vain.

"Well, let me put Alistar in the oven to roast, and then I'll bring back the candle," said the dragon to himself.

He dragged the dead body to the oven where he suddenly recognized his son. Seeing at last what he had done, he took the dagger in his hand, and ran off after Alistar and the candle. He whisked away like a werewolf, and where he passed he overturned rocks, tore up trees, and drew nearer and nearer like a thunder storm. Alistar came to a wide, deep river, jumped in and began to swim. When he reached the further bank the dragon stood on the other side of the river and roared. As he could not swim, he could only curse and cry at Alistar:

"You, dirty dog, what have you done?
Off with my candle you have run,
And made me kill my only son!"

Alistar answered from the other bank:

"Hey, you dragon, you filthy hog,
If you threaten me like a dog,
You will soon be dead as a log!"

The dragon went back home, but Alistar went on and on, where nobody's feet had ever gone. While he was walking he looked at the candle and tried to blow it out but instead of going out the candle burnt all the brighter.

He tried to pinch it out with his fingers, but the flame did not burn him. He put it against his shirt, but the shirt did not catch fire. The candle had such a strange light: it did not burn his hand, it did not burn one strand, but lit up all the land. So Alistar put it into his bag and went on further.

He walked and walked until he came to a landlord's house, where he stopped, and found work. The landlord saw that he was a clever hard-working young man, and appointed him as head groom. He gave him a room and there he lived and worked. Among the stable-men there was one spiteful and jealous fellow who went to the landlord one day and said:

"My lord, do you know what Alistar said?"

"I shall know if you tell me."

"He said that if you wish, he will bring you the dragon's horse."

"The dragon's horse? Call him here at once."

The stable-man went, called Alistar, and the landlord ordered him:

"Go and bring me the dragon's horse or I'll cut off your head."

There was nothing he could do. He just bowed to the landlord and set out. He walked and walked all day, and at midnight came to the dragon's estate. There he quietly entered the stable, but the horse felt him at once, and neighed three times. The dragon came running — clop, clop, clop — to the stable door with a lantern in his land.

Alistar turned three times round on one heel upon the ground, and flew under the stable eaves. The dragon looked in all the corners under the manger, all round the stable, but could see nobody. Feeling satisfied, he locked the stable and went back into the house. Then Alistar flew down from the eaves, and tried to take the horse, but it began to kick and neigh even louder.

The dragon came running up again and began to search the stable inside and out, but found nothing.

"Stop, your neighing, you stupid horse, you just want to spoil my sleep, of course!" cried the dragon, who was in bad temper, and taking a whip, began to make the poor horse skip.

"If I hear you neighing once more, I'll come back and skin you."

The dragon went back into the house, and when everything was quiet Alistar flew down from under the stable eaves, turned into a man, and when he came up to the horse, this time it did not neigh. He took it quickly out of the stable, mounted it and was gone. The dragon heard only the clatter of the hooves beyond the stable. He set off in pursuit in a furious rage.

Alistar urged the horse on, but the dragon ran after him, faster and faster. When Alistar had crossed the wide river, the dragon stood on the other bank, and seeing Alistar mounted on the horse cried:

"You, dirty dog, what have you done?
Off with my candle you have run,

And made me kill my only son,
And stolen my horse, my favourite one!"

Alistar answered him:

"Hey, you dragon, you filthy hog,
If you threaten me like a dog,
You will soon be dead as a log!"

The dragon went home gnawing his nails with rage, while Alistar went flying as swift as the wind back to the landlord's estate. As soon as he entered the courtyard he gave the horse to the landlord, who was as pleased as a dog with two tails.

If you do not know it, you should:
That dogs chase hares in the wood,
That hawks hunt field-mice for food,
And evil hunts down the good.

And here's what happened to Alistar when the spiteful stableman went to the landlord the second time and said:

"My lord, you are rich, you are strong, you know much, but you have no idea of what people say here."

"Just what do you want to tell me about?"

"Alistar has boasted that if you wish, he could bring you the dragon's ermine cap."

"Call him here!"

The stable-man went and brought Alistar and the landlord said:

"Bring me the dragon's ermine cap, or I'll cut off your head."

Alistar kept silent and set off, as he knew very well that it was no use arguing with the landlord.

He walked and walked and just before he reached the dragon's home, dark clouds rolled up and a terrible rainstorm began. Lightning pierced the clouds, thunder rattled the sky, and the rain washed furrows in the soil.

The brave lad passed on through the storm and when he drew near the dragon's house, he turned three times round, with one heel on the ground and wished to become a cat, and a cat he became. Then he went to the dragon's door and began to miaow and to scratch to be let in.

The dragon was sleeping, but his wife shouted at him:

"Get up, dragon, get up! Go and open the door. Some poor cat is half-drowned in the rain."

The dragon got up, and when he opened the door, the cat entered the house and sat near the stove to dry. The dragon looked straight into the cat's eyes and cried:

"Oh, this is Alistar! At last you have fallen into my hands!"

"What's the matter with you, dragon? You've gone off your head! You don't want to kill such a beautiful cat, do you?"

"I recognize by its eyes that this is Alistar turned into a cat."

"Go to sleep and don't talk nonsense."

When the dragon fell asleep, the cat crept up as stealthily as only a cat can and began to pull out the ermine cap from under the dragon's pillow. It pulled and pulled, but it could not get it out. Then Alistar turned himself back into a man again and when he took out the cap, the dragon woke and grabbed hold of him.

"Didn't I tell you that it was Alistar? Get up, wife, and make a fire quickly in the oven, because we have something to roast for supper now."

When the dragon's wife lit the fire, they saw that Alistar was very thin, a mere bag of bones.

"There's no use in roasting him", said the dragon, "put out the fire, and let us feed him up."

They began to feed him on shortbread, walnuts, and fresh milk. In a month Alistar was so fat that he could hardly see out of his eyes.

"Now he is ready to be roasted", said the dragon happily. "Heat the copper oven, dear wife, and roast him well. I'll go round to invite the guests."

No sooner said, than done. The dragon's wife lit a log fire in the copper oven, made it red-hot, and then putting the big, long-handled shovel at the mouth of the oven, went to Alistar and said:

"Get on the shovel, and I'll push you into the oven!"

Alistar got up and stood on it.

"Lie down!" cried the dragon's wife.

He lay on the very edge of the shovel, hanging his legs down.

"What a block-head you are! Lie properly on the shovel or don't you know how?"

"How am I to know, if I have never set eyes on such a shovel or such an oven before? Show me the way and I shall lie as you want me to".

"Get down!" cried the dragon's wife, and she herself sat on the shovel. Then she lay down on her back her legs stretched out.

That was just what Alistar was waiting for.

The next moment he grabbed the handle of the shovel, and in a twinkling of an eye pushed her into the red-hot oven, and then bang! — closed the door!

Alistar took the dragon's ermine cap and started out for home Meanwhile the dragon returned with his guests, seated them at table and went to the copper oven. When he opened the door and saw his wife there baked as brown as a currant bun, his heart almost burst. He seized his sword, left his guests and ran off after Alistar. He sped along as swift as a flash of lightning.

"With fiery nostrils all aflare
With flame his eyeballs burned
With smoke a-curling from each ear,
The earth beneath him churned,
And when the raging dragon passed near
The hills were overturned."

When he came to the wide river, Alistar had crossed already and was far away. The dragon swelled up and roared:

"You, dirty dog, what have you done?
Off with my candle, you have run,
And made me kill my only son,
And stolen my horse, my favourite one,
And have cooked my wife, like a currant bun.
And taken my ermine cap, now I've none!"

Alistar turned and answered:

"Hey, you, dragon, you filthy hog,
If you threaten me like a dog,
You will soon be dead as a log!"

Alistar took the ermine cap to the landlord, and gave it to him, but the brave lad had no time for a rest after such a long journey, when he was called again:

"You have brought me the horse, you have brought me the ermine cap, but now you must bring me the dragon himself", ordered the landlord.

Alistar took a hatchet, a hand saw, a chisel and a plane, and set out.

When he came near the dragon's house he turned into an old man with beard, and in front of the gate he began to shout:

"My lords and masters, if you need barrels of any kind I can supply them. Who needs casks come here to the old man. I make small wine casks and big barrels of all kinds on the spot."

The dragon heard him shouting his wares, invited him into the house and employed him to make some new casks, and to repair some old ones.

The master cooper began to work, and in a few days made a very nice oaken barrel, which was simply a pleasure to look at.

The dragon was wery glad when he saw what a fine barrel took shape, in the old man's hands.

"Well", said the dragon to the old man, "now my barrels and casks won't leak any more."

"They won't leak if you will help me a little. My sight is getting rather poor, and I don't see all the leaks to plug them with mace reed."

"And what do you want me to do, grandad?"

"Get into the big barrel and tell if you see any chinks of light."

The dragon got into the big barrel and looked carefully at all the staves, but did not see a single chink.

"Everything is in order, grandad, the staves sit very close to each other, and are all well-planed and arranged."

"Now wait a moment while I put the lid on to see if it fits well". Alistar put the lid on, and hammered on the iron hoops.

"Is there any chink of light to be seen?"

"No, not a sign!"

"Now take a deep breath, swell out your chest, dragon, to see if the cask is durable."

The dragon swelled himself up as much as he could.

"A little bit more", said the old man, "use all your strength."

Not even a hoop moved, not a single stave shifted from its place. The dragon cried:

"I can swell no more, I have no strength left!"

"Well, good luck to you!"

Now the dragon understood that he had fallen into Alistar's hands, and there was nothing he could do.

Alistar began to roll the barrel along the road bumping the dragon about inside until he didn't know his head from his heels until they reached the landlord's house.

When the landlord heard them coming, he ran out quickly to meet them, as he had never seen a dragon before.

"Alistar, take off the lid, and let me see him."

"No, my lord, I cannot set him free, otherwise he'll tear us all to pieces. He is very angry now, and nobody would be able to deal with him."

"Then make a hole in the barrel, so that I can see him at least with one eye."

Alistar took a gimlet and made a hole in the barrel. When the landlord put his eye to the hole to have a look, the dragon breathed in so strongly that the landlord was sucked in through the hole like a thread through the eye of a needle, and disappeared inside the barrel.

"There you are", said Alistar, "you wanted a dragon, and now you've got one, or rather one's got you!" Then he rolled the cask to a pile of wood standing in the yard, quickly set fire to it, and both the dragon and the landlord were burnt so that not even ashes remained.

When Alistar went to his room to take a rest, he had no sooner opened the door of his room, than the candle flame which had been burning all the time, began to flicker to and fro, and then suddenly blazed up, and out of it, magically stepped a young beautiful girl, so lovely that he couldn't stop gazing at her.

"Tell me, dear girl, who you are, and what great troubles you have, that

them home would receive the yougest one as his bride as well as half the kingdom.

But nobody was found ready to undertake the task.

At the King's palace there was a stable-man who fed the King's horses and carried away the manure. His name was Visan. Hearing about the King's offer he thought:

"Well, I shall always be a poor needy fellow, and my hair will grow through my cap if I remain here in the King's stables. It would be better to go and find his daughters."

One morning when he should have taken out the horses, and cleaned out the stables, he sat idly on the straw, not even thinking of doing his work.

The bailiff came along, shouting and swearing:

"Hey, you lazy devil, why are you sitting on your backside and not feeding the King's horses, and carrying away the manure?"

Then Visan answered:

"I have worked enough in the stables for many years. Now you can go and do it yourself. Go to the King and tell him that I'm ready to go and find his daughters and bring them back home."

The bailiff went angrily to the King to tell him all about it. Soon after that the King summoned Visan.

"Did you promise to find my daughters and bring them back?"

"Yes, I did, your Highness, but you must build me a stone tower half as high as the sky, and forge me a chain nine miles long."

The King gave orders that both the tower and the chain should be made.

"Now you must make me a mace of iron and steel."

That was also made. Visan took, it whirled it around over his head three times, and hurled it high up into the sky. Then he said:

"Now I'll take a little nap, but when you hear the mace come whizzing down, wake me up."

He went to bed and slept for three days and nights on end.

Then they heard the mace come whizzing and thundering through the clouds and they woke him up.

Visan got up, stretched out his little finger and caught it. When he looked at the mace, he saw it was flattened.

Visan said:

"Go to the King and tell him to order me another mace of better iron and purer steel."

They made him a mace of better iron and purer steel, and when he hurled it into the sky, it flew for a whole week, struck against the sun and returned undamaged.

"That's fine!" said Visan.

He bade everybody good-bye, took the mace and the chain, and climbed up into the tower. There he unrolled the chain, whirled it round and hurled

it up into the sky, where it caught round the arches of heaven. Visan tugged on it to see if it was fastened well, and then he began to climb up. Higher and higher he climbed until he reached the sky. There it was just like it is on the earth. When he looked on one side he saw a castle made of copper. That was where the King's eldest daughter lived. Visan set off along the road and arrived at the palace at dinner time. When he stepped up to the gates the King's daughter said:

"I pity your youth, brave lad! If my dragon comes, he'll leave nothing of you, but your bones."

Visan asked: "How strong is your dragon?"

"He is so strong that he hurls his mace away over three kingdoms and it flies through the clouds, enters the castle door, encircles the table three times and hangs itself upon its nail."

Visan said:

"Don't worry about him, but give me something to eat and drink."

"I'll give you whatever you like and welcome, only free me from this terrible dragon", begged the princess.

After Visan had eaten and rested, he asked:

"By what road does your dragon come home?"

"By the one over the copper bridge."

At that moment he saw the dragon's mace flying high in the sky. It flew down through the gate, from the gate through the door, from the door round the table three times, and after that hung itself up on its nail. The King's daughter then began to prepare the food. By the time the dragon arrived the food would be neither too hot nor too cold, but just right to be eaten.

Visan took the dragon's mace and hurled it so that it whizzed through the clouds.

The dragon saw it and said:

"Dangerous guests are waiting for me at home."

Visan went to the copper bridge and hid beneath it. He sat for some time and then he heard the dragon quickly approaching and the ground shaking beneath him. When he came to the bridge, his horse refused to pass over it. The dragon struck it with his whip and began to shout and swear:

"A curse upon you, cowardly jade!
May the dogs eat your inside,
May the wolves tear off your hide,
May the crows peck out your eyes!
Have you not eaten oatmeal fine?
Have you not drunk enough good wine?"

The horse answered:

"I have eaten good oats and drunk good wine, but Visan is hiding under the bridge. Beat me or not, I shan't move another step."

you can neither walk nor talk, but you only burn all the time without knowing why?"

"Dear Alistar, my terrible sufferings have come to an end. You released me from them, when you killed the dragon."

Then the beautiful young girl began to tell him how the dragon had stolen her to be his son's bride, but when she would not agree he put a curse on her, and turned her into a candle, as long as he should live, to always burn, but never to warm anybody and never to set anything afire.

"I should probably have gone on burning for many years, if you hadn't killed the wicked dragon and broken the spell."

Alistar embraced her, kissed her, and invited all the people who lived round about to come and celebrate their wedding party. And what a feast it was! I was at that wedding party myself, and had a wonderful time and maybe I should still be there eating and drinking, only I left it to come to tell you all that happened to Alistar before his wedding.

BRAVE VISAN

Once upon a time there was a King who had three daughters. He built a palace under his castle, where he kept the three maidens locked in, so that they could not come out and see the light of day.

One day an old counsellor who was talking with the King said to him:

"Your Highness, why do you keep those girls locked away underground? Everywhere the other maidens dance, sing and go to wedding parties, while your daughters will not even know how to speak with Kings, princes and noblemen, when they come out."

The King thought it over, then he called a coachman and ordered him to harness six horses to the coach, and to take the girls to the dance.

The girls dressed themselwes in their best, so that they really looked like a King's daughters, got into the coach and started out for the dance. Halfway there three dragons swept down from the sky and seized the three daughters and carried them away.

A great sorrow came upon the palace that the girls had been permitted to go, but who was to be blamed? The King remained alone with great grief in his heart, since he had no more daughters. He waited and waited for news of the missing princesses, but when none came, he made a declaration that the brave fellow who could find his three daughters and bring

Then the dragon cried:

"Come out from under the bridge, Visan, and we shall become sworn brothers. There is nobody else like you and me in the whole world. We shall eat bread, drink wine and live like kings!"

Visan did not believe that the dragon had good intentions and answered:

"With such a dog of dragon I don't wish to be a sworn brother. How do you want to fight? Shall we wrestle or take our swords?"

The dragon said:

"Let's wrestle, that is fairer."

They wrestled and wrestled, from morning till midday, when the dragon fell. Then Visan lifted the dragon and threw him down so that he sank into the ground almost up to his waist. Then he cut off his head, and left three mounds of meat and three lakes of blood.

After that Visan mounted the dragon's horse, rode to the King's eldest daughter and said:

"Take this horse and ride off home."

Then Visan went on his way, a night and a day, until he saw a castle of polished silver in the distance. The second dragon with the King's middle daughter lived there. When he came to the gates of the castle the King's daughter said:

"I pity your youth, brave lad, for as soon as my dragon comes he'll eat you, and won't even leave any bones!"

Visan asked:

"How strong is your dragon?"

"He is so strong that he hurls his mace away over nine kingdoms, it flies back through the gate, encircles the table three times, and hangs itself on the wall."

Visan said:

"Don't worry about him, but give me something to eat and drink."

"I'll give you whatever you like and welcome, only free me from this terrible dragon," begged the princess.

He sat down to take a rest, and while he was eating and drinking, he heard the dragon's mace coming rumbling along as if there were an earthquake.

Visan went out caught the mace in flight, and threw it back one kingdom ffarther, beyond the dragon.

The dragon saw his mace fly by and said:

"Dangerous guests are waiting for me at home. Can it be Visan? There is none so brave in all the world as he".

Visan asked:

"By what road does the dragon come home?"

"By the one over the silver bridge."

The brave lad went to the silver bridge, hid beneath it and began to wait.

Soon after he heard the earth groaning and quaking and the waters bubbling up. It was the dragon coming on his horse. When he reached the bridge his horse stopped, and would not go any further. The dragon struck it with the whip and began to shout and swear:

"A curse upon you, cowardly jade!
May the dogs eat your inside,
May the wolves tear off your hide,
May the crows peck out your eyes!
Why do you stop, and grow all limp?
Have you seen a devil or imp?
Brave Visan is not yet born,
Has not come to fight this morn!"

Then Visan came out from under the bridge and said:

"Roar, you dog of dragon, roar,
Here am I to spill your gore!"

The dragon cunningly answered:

"Visan, Visan, let's be sworn brothers since there is nobody else like you and me in the whole world. We shall eat bread, drink wine and live like kings."

Visan knew that the dragon had no good intentions and replied:

"I shall never become a sworn brother of such a log of a dragon. How do you want to fight? Shall we wrestle or take our swords?"

The dragon said:

"Let's wrestle as it is fairer."

They wrestled and wrestled from morning till afternoon, but neither of them gained the victory. At last Visan threw the dragon down, so that he sank into the ground up to the knees. Then the dragon threw Visan down, so that he sank into the ground up to the waist. Visan rose in a rage, seized the dragon by the waist and hurled him down so hard, that he sank into the ground up to his neck. Then he unsheathed his sword, cut off the dragon's head and left three mounds of meat and three lakes of blood. After that Visan took the dragon's horse, rode to the King's middle daughter and said:

"Take this horse and ride off home on it."

Visan went on his way, up hill down dale, through forest and vale until he saw some golden towers in the distance. When he drew near he saw that all the windows and doors were of solid gold, encrusted with patterns of precious stones. That was the castle of the dragon who had stolen the King's youngest daughter.

Visan came to the gates and called:

"Is the master at home?"

The King's daughter came out and said:

"I pity your youth, brave lad, as soons as my dragon comes he'll eat you, and not even your hat will be left!"

"How strong is your dragon?"

"He is so strong that he throws his mace away over twelve kingdoms and it comes flying back through the clouds, through the gate, enters the door, encircles the table three times and hangs itself up its nail."

"Don't worry about him, but give me something to eat and drink."

"I'll give you whatever you like and welcome, only free me from this terrible dragon", begged the princess.

While he was taking a rest and eating he saw the dragon's mace returning. Visan got up to stop it, but he could not. He waited for it to hang itself up on its nail, took it down and when he hurled it back, the mace flew on one kingdom further than the dragon had thrown it."

The dragon saw his mace come hurling back and said:

"Oh, a dangerous enemy has come to my castle. Can it be Visan? There is none so brave in all the world as he."

Visan did not finish eating, but went out and asked the princess:

"By what road does the dragon come home?"

"By the one over the golden bridge."

Visan went to the golden bridge, hid beneath it and began to wait. Soon the earth began to shake, and with the thunder of horse's hooves the dragon came. When he reached the bridge, his horse began to tremble and retreat. The dragon struck it with his whip and shouted and swore so loudly that the valley resounded and the waters grew muddy:

"A curse upon you, cowardly jade!
May the dogs eat your inside,
May the wolves tear off your hide,
May the crows peck out your eyes!
Why do you stop, and grow all limp?
Have you seen a devil or imp?
Brave Visan has not been born,
Has not come to fight this morn!"

Visan came out from under the bridge and said:

"Roar, you dog of dragon, roar,
Here am I to spill your gore!"

The dragon recognized him and cunnigly said:

"Visan, Visan, let's be sworn brothers! There is nobody else like you and me in the whole world. We shall eat bread, drink wine and live like kings."

Visan knew the dragon had no good intentions and answered:

"I shall never be so stupid as to become a sworn brother of such a dog of a dragon as you! How do you want to fight? Shall we take our swords or maces or shall we wrestle?"

"Let us wrestle, since it suits brave men better."

They wrestled and wrestled from morning till afternoon but neither of them gained the victory.

"Let us turn into two flint wheels and let one climb on one hill, and the other on another, and let us charge against each other. The one who cracks will be defeated", said the dragon.

The wheels began to roll down from the steep hills, and struck against each other so fiercely that sparks flew on all sides. They fought in such a way till five o'clock in the afternoon, but both remained unbroken. Seeing that it was impossible to defeat Visan thus, the dragon turned into a green flame. Visan in his turn turned into a red flame, and again they took up the fight till sunset, when both of them fell down exhausted. As they were lying so they saw a carrion crow flying over them.

The dragon cried:

"Carrion crow, carrion crow, fly down to that castle and bring me a slice of bread and a glass of wine to bring me back my strength, and as a reward I'll give you Visan's corpse to eat."

Then Visan asked the crow:

"Carrion crow, carrion crow, fly down to that pond, wet your wings with water and sprinkle it on the green flame to weaken that dog of a dragon, and I'll give you nine mounds of dragon meat to eat."

The crow wetted its wings with water, sprinkled the green flame and put it out. When Visan seized the dragon and hurled him down, the dragon sank into the ground up to his ears. Then he took his iron mace and crack! crack! crack! he smote him on the head. He left behind three mounds of meat, and said to the crow:

"Here at the golden bridge are three mounds of dragon meat at the silver bridge there are three more, and at the copper bridge — yet other three. Eat them, how and when you will, and may they do you good!"

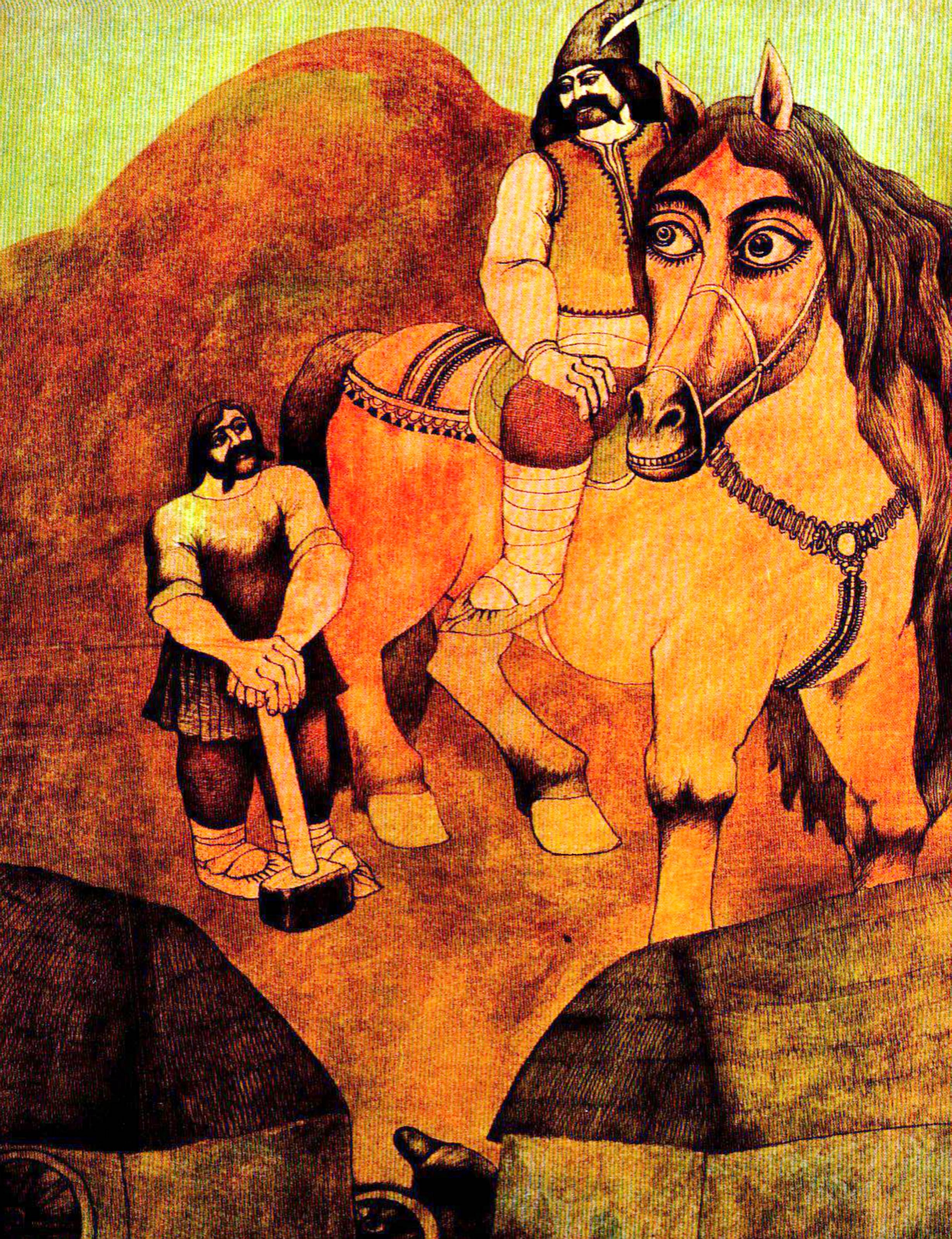
What else remained for Visan to do? He took the dragon's horse and rode to the golden palace, where he found the King's youngest daughter. He rode with her till they overtook the middle one, and then the eldest one. When they were all gathered together they made a feast, and ate and drank for three days and three nights running.

"Now let me take you to your father," said the brave lad.

So they set out and Visan was wery glad that misfortunes were behind them. They came to the place where the chain was hanging down, and he took the King's eldest daughter under his arm and descended till they reached the top of the tower. Then he climbed up again and came down with the middle one. For the third time he climbed up and brought down the youngest one and now they all stood in the tower.

Suddenly the princesses remembered something:

"Oh, dear me, I have forgotten my precious comb in the dragon's castle," said the eldest.



"I have forgotten mine too", said the middle one.
"I too," said the youngest.
All the three sisters had forgotten their precious combs.
"Where did you leave them?" asked Visan.
Each of them told him where they had left their precious combs and Visan climbed up once more to fetch them.
The King saw his daughters through his spy-glass, and sent some soldiers to bring them down. When he understood that he would have to marry his youngest daughter to a common servant, he thought that it would be a disgrace for a King to have such a son-in-law. So he gave orders that the stone tower should be destroyed.
"Visan won't return to earth any more. He'll remain up there in the sky," thought the King gladly.
When Visan returned with the precious combs, and climbed down to the end of the chain, he could not see any tower. It was impossible for him to reach the earth. There was nothing else to do but to return to the sky, and there he was so sad and miserable that he didn't know what to do or where to go. At last he decided to go to the dragon's castle, since there he would find food and shelter. But it was very different living alone, and having nobody to speak with.
Visan entered the golden palace where the King's youngest daughter had lived, went to bed and appeared to be dead.
The dragons had three sisters, three greedy vultures. When they heard about the death of the dragons they said:
"Let us go and take some things from their castles since nobody will need them."
They came to take gold, precious stones and other things, because the dragons had been very rich.
When the three vultures entered the golden palace, they saw Visan. Seeing him lying with his eyes closed, they thought that he was dead and said:
"He has killed our brothers, but now he has met his end as well!"
The eldest vulture told the youngest one:
"Go and seize him by leg. Tear his flesh to the bone, and if he doesn't move we shall go and eat him."
The youngest vulture seized him with her iron beak and tore his flesh to the bone, but Visan did not move.
Then the eldest vulture told the middle one:
"Go and seize him by the arm and tear his flesh to the bone, and if he doesn't move we shall go and eat him."
Visan endured it all as best as he could, but did not move.
The eldest vulture said:
"Now I shall go and peck out one of his eyes, and if he does not move we

shall go and eat him".

The eldest vulture had a beak like steel and talons like sickles. She went slowly towards him, but when she was just about to peck out his eye, he gripped her by the neck, and looked under the bed for an axe to chop off her head.

The other two vultures were terrified and disappeared into the blue. The captured one began to beg and plead:

"Don't kill me, I implore you. I will do anything for you if you will only spare my life."

"Will you take me back to mother earth?"

What could the old vulture say, when her life was in danger?

„Very well, brave Visan, only spare my life. Mount me and wish where you want to go and I shall take you there."

Visan mounted on her back and when she stretched out her wings, she covered half of the sky.

"How shall I take you as quick, as thought or as swift as the wind?"

„As swift as the wind," said Visan.

When they started off he only felt the wind in his face.

Soon afterwards the vulture descended on the earth.

There she said good-bye to Visan. He thanked her and wished her good luck.

The vulture flew back into the sky, while Visan set out for the King's castle. He walked and walked upon his way by moonlit night and sunlit day, until he came to a gipsy's tent. The gipsy, who had a herd of horses, said:

"What will you take to drive my horses to the pasture?"

"Well, seven gold pieces for a year."

So it was agreed and Visan became the gipsy's herdsman and began to look after the horses.

Some time later a prince, a prospective bridegroom, came to ask the King for the hand of his eldest daughter. After they had agreed and named the wedding day, the princess said:

"Make me a precious comb like the one I had in the dragon's castle in the sky, and then we shall celebrate the wedding party."

The bridegroom went to look for a master-craftsman to make the comb, and by chance found his way to the gipsy's tent.

"Are you a smith?"

"You need look no farther, I am."

"Can you make a precious comb for me?" asked the prince.

"Yes, I can do so if you give me gold and precious stones," answered the gipsy.

The prince gave him gold and precious stones, the gipsy heated them in the fire, but they blackened, and try as he might he could not manage to

make a comb. The gipsy did not know what to do. He sat down and began to cry, as he was afraid that his head would be cut off.

Visan waited for the gipsy to leave his work and to have his dinner, came up to the anvil, took a hammer and began to beat the anvil to give the impression that he was working, and after that he took the first precious comb out of his pocket.

"Come here, master, and have a look at this comb."

The gipsy looked and couldn't believe his eyes.

"Take the comb, go to the King's castle, and ask three purses of gold pieces for it," said Visan.

The gipsy took the comb to the castle and received the gold pieces. The King's daughter looked at the comb and recognized it:

"Father, father, this is the comb that Visan went to fetch from the dragon's castle in the sky!"

The King gave his daughter a slap, and said to her:

"Even if Visan had wings, he still couldn't return from the sky."

The girl kept silent and accepted the bridegroom.

The wedding party was very gay, and in such a way the King's eldest daughter was married.

Shortly after that a bridegroom came to ask the King for his middle daughter's hand in marriage.

After they had agreed about everything and named the wedding-day the princess demanded that the bridegroom should make her a gold and diamond comb like the one she had in the dragon's castle.

The bridegroom took gold and precious stones and went to the gipsy:

"Good day to you, master-craftsman!"

"Good day to you, my prince!"

"Can you make a gold and diamond comb for me?"

"If you give me gold and precious stones, I can, why not!"

The prince left the diamonds and the gold, and the gipsy began to work. He put the diamonds and the gold into the fire, they became red and discoloured, and try as he might he could do nothing with them. The gipsy was so miserable and afraid that he began to cry, and went into his tent.

Visan, who was nearby, went to the smithy as soon as the gipsy left it, took the hammer and began to beat the anvil as if he was at work. Then he took the second comb out of his pocket.

"Come here, master, and take a look, the comb is ready."

The gipsy looked at it and was delighted.

When the prince saw such a beautiful comb he had tears of joy in his eyes. "How much do you ask for it?"

"Six purses of gold pieces."

The prince paid the six purses of gold pieces, took the comb and went off. When he gave the comb to his bride she recognized it.

"Of course I am."
"Can you make me a comb?"
"I can, why not, only give me gold and diamonds."
"And how much will you ask for it?"
"Nine purses of gold pieces."
They shook hands, and the gipsy set to work.

He did not leave his forge for three days. He melted down the gold and tried to set the sparkling stones, but again everything went wrong, and he couldn't make the comb. The prince came with his soldiers to receive the comb, but when he saw what had happened he ordered his men to bind the gipsy and took him away with them. They whipped him and sentenced him to have his head cut off. The gipsy tried to explain that it wasn't his fault, but they seemed to be deaf to all his pleas.

"You must make this comb as you made the other two, or if not find another master who can!"

"Let me return to my tent where I have a clever servant. If he can't make the comb, then nobody in the world can!"

They agreed and set him free. The gipsy went back to his tent, called Visan and said:

"Go to the smithy and make a comb for the King's youngest daughter, otherwise both of us must die."

Visan thought a while and then boldly decided to go to the King's palace instead of the gipsy.

The gipsy was only too glad to let him go, and Visan started off for the palace. He walked and walked until he came to a hillock, behind which he found a dead horse's head. He mounted the head and then made a sign with his mace up to the sky, down to the ground, and in the direction of the wind. Then he said:

"Carry me on my course, o noble yellow horse!"

The head turned into such a dashing charger, that there was not another one like it in the whole world.

The horse said to Visan:

"Put your hand into my right ear, and take out the clothes. Put them on and let's gallop off to the wedding party."

Visan drew out the clothes, put them on, and they galloped off to the palace. When he arrived there the King could not believe his eyes. Visan presented the third comb to the King's youngest daughter, set it in her hair and took her by the hand. Then he said to the King:

"If either of us is guilty before the other, let this mace fall on him and kill him."

Then he hurled his mace into the sky. It flew as high as the sun, and when it fell it struck the King upon the head, and drove him into the earth, and above him the long grass grew.

"Father, father, this comb is the one I had from the dragon, Visan must have brought it."

The King gave her a slap and said:

"Even if Visan had wings and he still couldn't return from the sky."

The girl kept silent and accepted the bridegroom, and so the King's middle daughter was married.

Some time passed and a bridegroom came to ask the King for his youngest daughter's hand in marriage. They were betrothed but she told the bridegroom that he had to make her a comb like the one she had left in the dragon's castle in the sky, otherwise she would not marry him.

The bridegroom took gold and diamonds, but where could he find such a master-craftsman?

He pinned all his faith on the gipsy. He came to his tent and asked: "Are you a smith?"

What happened next? Well, there was a very merry wedding party, such a feast that I should wish who wants to get married, to have the like of it.

"I mounted astride a short-handled spoon,
May it reach the mouth of the listener soon!"

LIGHT BEFORE ME SHINE, AND DARKNESS SPREAD BEHIND

A fairy tale is a fairy tale,
And to tell it all I shall not fail,
How everything happened and came to be,
As one night in the village they told it to me.

Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife. Soon after they got married a daughter was born to them. She grew up into a beautiful girl as lovely as a lily, as bright as a berry. Those young fellows who had reached the age to marry still delayed the day, thinking of her. After all she would surely marry soon and would have to choose somebody for her bridegroom.

But though every seed which falls into the ground sprouts freely, not all come into bud and flower. Rains and winds beat them down, uproot them and break them, then it is very difficult for them to recover, and raise their heads to the sun.

Terrible misfortune overtook the poor girl. One day her mother became ill and soon afterwards gave up her soul. Just before she died, she took a ring from her bosom, gave it to the girl, and said:

"You see this ring? Keep and treasure it like the apple of your eye. If someone comes to ask you to marry him, put this ring on his finger. If it fits, marry him, if not, send him away!"

The burial ceremony passed, her sorrow diminished a little, and the wooers came a-courting her favour one after another. The girl tried the ring on each one's finger, but it did not fit a single one, and she sent them all away.

At that time there lived a dwarf, named Tom Thumb with a beard as long as your arm, and he had a hideous grandson, as ugly as the devil. Somehow Tom Thumb got to know about the size of the ring. He lit a coal fire and made his grandson keep his hand in the flames for nine days and nine nights until it softened, then he put it on the anvil and beat it with nine hammers. He hammered and hammered it until he made his grandson's finger fit the ring.

Then he dressed him in a suit of gold and silver thread, decorated with diamonds and sent him as a prospective bridegroom to the girl. The ugly

monster bowed before the girl, and stretched out his finger to try on the ring. When she saw that the ring fitted his finger her eyes filled with tears.

The poor girl had never imagined that she would have such a bridegroom. But since her mother had so ordered before her death, there was nothing else she could do. She wept and sobbed, but nobody could console her.

At last after turning this way and that she managed to go to her mother's grave unnoticed by the dragon and began to cry:

"Ah, you dark, damp earth,
Ah, you dark, cold grave,
May the wind blow forth,
May the rain-storm rave.
May my tears sink down,
To my mother's heart.
Since the dawn I've known,
Bitter sorrow's smart!"

"What has happened to you, my dear daughter?" she heard a voice say, like a hollow groan.

"Oh, mother dear, you have left me the ring to my great misfortune, since not a usual bridegroom has appeared, but an ugly dragon, whose finger the ring fitted. Tell me, mother dear, how to get rid of him for I would rather lay by your side than marry such a monster!"

"My dear daughter, go home and tell the bridegroom that if he makes you a dress as beautiful as the sky at the sunrise, the sun at midday and the sky at sunset, you'll marry him, if not, then let him go away."

The girl returned home and told the dragon straight to his face that if he made her such a dress she would marry him, but if not he should come to her door no more.

Tom Thumb's grandson went to the kingdom of the dragons, and told them his trouble, and using their gold and diamonds they made such a beautiful dress as nobody had ever seen before.

Then he joyfully returned with the dress, and with a bow presented it to the girl. When she put it on she saw that the dress fitted her like a glove, and though the girl was very beautiful, in the dress she looked seven times lovelier. On the breast, the shoulders and hem shone three suns, one rising, one at midday and one setting.

The dragon was very glad, but the poor girl wilted away. Her rose face became quite grey, and when she saw that they were begining to prepare for the wedding party, she ran unnoticed to her mother's grave crying and sobbing:

"Ah, you dark damp earth,
Ah, you dark cold grave,
Open now — henceforth

Death alone I crave.
By your side I'll lie,
And upon your shawl
All my tears I'll dry,
Which unceasing fall.
Tell me mother, true,
Send me your reply
Tell me what to do —
Shall I live or die?"

And again from below the earth came the hollow voice:

"Daughter with grief oppressed,
Why weep on my breast,
Give my soul no rest?"

"Mother dear, mother dear," begged the girl, "what shall I do? They have made me a beautiful dress and are now hurrying to prepare the wedding."

"Go home and tell the bridegroom that he must make you another dress, even more beautiful, as bright as the day, and as light as the sky, as fresh as the flowers soaked by the showers, and smelling too of the honey-dew. If he can make you such a dress, then you will marry him, but if not tell him not to come near your door again."

The girl returned home and said to the bridegroom:

"If you wish me to be your wife, then make me another dress even more beautiful, as bright as the day, and as light as the sky, as fresh as the flowers soaked by the showers, and smelling too of the honey-dew. If not..."

She had not finished speaking before the dragon whisked off again to his brothers' kingdom, and aroused the best weavers and tailors. For three days they gathered flowers, collected precious stones and gold thread and sequins to adorn the dress, three days they spun the silken thread, and made such a dress as the world has never seen. When they sewed it birds began to twitter, people began to quiver, hearts went pitter-patter. But when the girl put it on — well, not a day in May, not a garland gay, not a garden bright, not the dawning light — no, nothing could compare with such beauty there.

Nobody could look at her without gasping with delight, but the poor girl hid herself from sight, and like a dark and gloomy cloud in sorrow went and wept aloud.

She secretly went to her mother's grave again and began to cry:

"Ah, you dark damp earth,
Ah, you dark cold grave,
Save me mother, from death,

From dark sorrow save.
Dark is death as well,
Darker is my lot.
For the third time tell,
Shall I live or not?"

"What has happened, dear daughter?", said the hollow voice.

"The dragon has made such a dress, and now he waits for me to give him my hand in marriage."

"My dear girl, tell him to make you a third dress as beautiful as the sky at night, with a thousand stars, all shining bright, with a silver moon a-riding high, and not a single cloud in the sky. If he makes such a dress and it pleases all those who see it pretend you are satisfied, and begin the wedding party. When all is going merrily and you come out into the courtyard to begin the first dance, place your hand on the flower on your breast and say: "Light before me shine, darkness spread behind," and then away you go out into the wide world. You will be as free as a bird in the sky, like the spring wind over the open field, and nobody will find the slightest trace of you."

The girl returned to the dragon and told him what he had to do, and the monster did not say a word, but decided to fulfil the task and uphold the dragons' honour. "Very well," he thought, "not today, and not tomorrow, but the day after you will be mine!" He went to the dragons and ordered the third dress. They worked for three days and nights, and to tell you how beautiful that dress was would take another three days and nights, but we have no time. Tom Thumb's grandson returned with the new dress, and the girl put it on, and indeed it was extremely beautiful. Two diamonds shone on her shoulders like two morning stars, and round her waist was a girdle decorated with thousands of rubies and emeralds. The silver moon on her bosom shone full and clear, but though the moon was lovely, the girl's face was lovelier still. Everybody was delighted and shortly after that the wedding party began. Crowds of people came, there was much fun and merriment, the music was playing, and nobody thought for a moment that so soon after its beginning the end would come.

The time came when according to the custom the bride had to be led out into the courtyard for the first dance. The crowd stepped aside to make place for them, and just at that moment the bride placed her hand on the flower on her breast and said:

"Light before me shine, darkness spread behind!"

And as she said these words a dark fog fell, and nobody saw what happened to the girl.

Leaving the courtyard she walked and walked to the edge of the sky, beneath the starlight until she came to a dense forest with tall trees and,

as darkness fell, she looked for a place in the thicket to rest overnight.

Tom Thumb's grandson went straight to the dragons' kingdom where they wasted no time but sent another dragon with him and two fierce blood-hounds. They went back to the courtyard and began to sniff out the bride's traces. The dogs ran on with their heads down and tails up, while the two dragons followed them with their swords in hand, grinding their teeth with rage, and determined by hook or by crook to get the girl back as soon as possible.

After a short time the dogs came to the forest, and began to bark. They went howling round the thicket where the girl was hidden. She was so terrified and horrified that she almost wished the earth would swallow her up.

One of the dragons seized her by the arm and tried to pull her out of the bushes, but she did not want to come. Then Tom Thumb's grandson without further ado raised his sword and cut off the girl's arms up to the elbows. The poor girl fell on the ground moaning and crying, while the cruel dragon gave one hand to one dog and the second to the other. Then, making a sign to the other dragon to follow, he went off. The girl remained in great pain and sorrow, until her arms stopped bleeding. When she went into the forest, a furious storm began. It was so fierce that trees were uprooted. It tore off the top of a tree where there was a nest with some chicks in it. The branches and the nest with the chicks in, fell just in front of the girl. The chicks cheeped so sadly, that even a heart of stone would have been melted.

The girl was touched by the pitiful cheeping and making haste she gathered them with the stumps of her arms. Then she squatted down and protected them under her skirt until the storm and the rain had passed. She was wondering what to do with them when she saw a bird fluttering among the trees, while the chicks started to cheep and hop towards her.

The mother-bird was very glad to find her chicks again, and asked the girl:

"How can I reward you for your great kindness?"

"However you like."

"I should like very much to restore your hands, but I haven't got any water as clear as a tear from the spring of the springs, which is found beneath under the dragons' rock. I cannot get any since no bird can fly there. But I shall look after you as I look after my own chicks, and I shall take good care of you."

The bird stretched one of her wings over the girl and she became a chick like the others.

The mother-bird looked after them until they grew big enough to sing at the break of the day, and to fly over the wide fields. All the chicks flew together, looked for food together, and went to sleep in the nest together.

Not far from the forest where the chicks lived there was a large and beautiful orchard which belonged to the Green King.

The young birds got used to pecking at the little worms and beetles there, until one day they found a lovely big apple tree. In the morning it became green, at noon was in blossom, and in the evening the apples were ripe. They were so sweet and juicy that they made your mouth water. Straight away the birds began to peck at all of them.

The Green King was patient for a day or two, but when he saw he would soon have no apples left, he called his three sons and said to them:

"My dear sons, if you want to have apples to eat, you must watch the apple tree."

"Very well, father, we shall watch it," said all the sons together.

On the first night the eldest son went to watch the apple tree, but soon he felt so drowsy that he fell asleep, and could not wake up even after sunrise.

He was covered in shame and everybody laughed at him, the King, his brothers and the courtiers.

On the second night the middle son went to keep watch. He did his best not to fall asleep, but as soon as darkness fell, he slept even sounder than his brother. On the next day they had somebody else to laugh at and to make fun of.

On the third night the youngest son went to watch the apple tree. He armed himself carefully, chose a hidden place, and sat there waiting. He watched and watched, and at last a flock of birds flew down and settled on the apple tree. The lad put the gun to his eye, but when he was just going to pull the trigger one bird cried:

"Don't shoot, prince, you may kill us and rob yourself of your happiness."

The King's son lowered his gun, frightened, while the bird hopped down from one branch to another until it reached the ground, where it turned again into a most beautiful girl.

The King's son immediately fell deeply in love with her, but when he saw her poor wounded arms, he began to weep, and she told him about her unhappy fate.

"I would give my body and soul to see your hands grow again," said the King's son. "But is it really possible?"

"When the mother-bird turned me into a chick, she told me that if anybody could bring water as clear as a tear from the spring of springs which is bound beneath the dragons' rock, then I should be cured, and my hands would grow again."

The King's son looked around under the trees in the orchard and saw a red poppy which had just blossomed. He picked the flower and pinned it on her bosom.

"Take this flower for I am going by unknown roads on a long journey.

If you miss me, throw it into quiet water. If it sinks do not wait for me. If it floats in the middle, wait for me your whole life. If it floats to the bank, expect me back in a year."

"But where are you going?"

"To the dragons' rock."

"Even birds can't fly there, but for a man it is still more difficult."

"If I return, where shall I find you?"

"Every morning I shall sing at sunrise in the centre of your orchard," the beautiful girl said to the Green King's son, hopped on to a branch, and turned again into a bird.

Later, with the poppy in her beak she flew to a quiet river, and throwing it into the water, she watched attentively to see what would happen. The flower floated a little downstream, then it floated towards the bank and stopped as if it had grown there. The bird was very glad and flew quickly to the palace to see whether the prince was there, but he wasn't. He was already far away on his journey to the dragon's Kingdom to find the spring of springs with water as clear as a tear.

The bird began to sing the song of parting and the song of happy meeting, while the King's son walked and walked through forest and vale, up-hill down-dale, until he came to a place where monsters dwelt, and one day he came to a deep ravine, where three devils were fighting among themselves tearing at each other's hair, and raising the dust upon the air. Seeing the traveller they said:

"Good fellow, as chance has brought you here, help us to find the solution of our quarrel. Our father on his death-bed left us three things as our inheritance, but we cannot share them fairly."

"And what did he leave you?"

"A pair of peasant's sandals, a cap and a shepherd's flute. But the sandals, the cap and the flute are not ordinary ones. They are magic. When one puts on the peasant's sandals, he can walk with them on water as if on the earth. When one puts on the cap, he can walk along the road without any worry, since nobody can see him, and if you play on the shepherd's flute, it will take you wherever you wish."

The traveller hearing about their quarrel answered:

"It's difficult to judge. You see, there is no use in having the three things separately. One of you will walk on water, the next somewhere else and the third will disappear, but if one of you has them all, then that would be quite another thing. I intend that one of you should receive them all, so listen to me. Leave the things here in the ravine, and run as far as that hill there and back. The first one to return here will have all the three things."

"Agreed," said the devils.

"Then stand in a line and ready, steady, go!"

When the devils dashed off, they raised a cloud of dust behind them. The

King's son put on the peasant's sandals and the cap, and raised the shepherd's flute to his lips. He only just managed to think, and at once was at the dragons rock, near the spring of springs, with water as clear as a tear.

The dragons nearby felt that somebody was taking water from the spring, and all of them, young and old gathered round, but saw nobody. They made a complete circle round the spring and looked everywhere to see if anybody was there.

One of the dragons lowered his head just over the spring, so that the King's son could not take any water. Seeing this he raised his mace and struck the dragon such a blow on the head that the monster went all dizzy.

"Who struck me?" cried the dragon, and in turn struck another dragon standing with his back to him whom he suspected. The second one immediately struck another, and so all the dragons began to fight. It was such a terrible battle that all the dragons were killed except one. He was so strong that neither sword nor mace could hurt him.

"If the sword and the mace cannot take him, then prison will," said the brave lad, and putting the flute to his lips wished that he and the dragon were at the King's palace. Immediately he found himself at home. He put the dragon into a dungeon under heavy locks and bars, while he himself went to the apple tree in the orchard. The bird seeing him approaching, hopped from branch to branch down to the ground, and turned into a beautiful girl. The King's son quickly sprinkled her hands with spring water three times, and they grew again as they had been before. The prince laughed with joy and the girl wept for gladness.

"As bright as the sun without cloud again,
As sweet as a flower refreshed by the rain,
As fresh as a meadow blooming in May,
When the trees in the breeze with their branches sway,
So the maiden appeared with such beauty and grace
With a sunny smile on her glowing face."

After that they went to the Green King's palace. The King was so glad that his son returned and with such a beautiful girl, but just as he was about to embrace them, the guards cried out in great fear that the prison walls were tumbling down and that the dragon was escaping. The King's son put on the magic cap, and as the dragon drew near he struck two terrific blows with his mace, so that the monster fell to the ground.

When the girl saw him she recognized him as Tom Thumb's grandson and began to tremble. The dragon gathered his remaining strength and tried to seize her. As he stretched out his paw, she saw her ring on his finger and swiftly snatched it off. At that very moment the dragon turned into a heap of dust and bones as his time had come.

The Green King ordered some servants to burn the bones and to throw the ashes to the winds. After that he gave a wedding party beyond your wildest dreams. Hosts of people came and it so happened that I was there as well. I wished the couple well, and ate and drank my fill, and left them to live in peace and happiness.

FEARLESS FLINT

Once upon a time there lived a woman who had two sons and one daughter. The boys were older and the girl younger. One spring the brothers went to the field to plough. They ploughed and ploughed and at last there remained only one small strip unploughed, but that strip seemed to them more difficult than the whole ploughing they had done that spring. One fine morning they got the plough and the harrow ready and before leaving for the field, said to their mother:

"Mother, cook us some food and send our little sister with it to the field."

"Oh, my dear sons, how can I send her such a long way, while she is still little, and can get lost, and I'll never be able to find her."

"She won't get lost, mother. We shall yoke the oxen to the plough and we shall make a furrow from the house up to the field, and she'll follow the furrow to find us."

The mother began to cook some food, and the boys, urging the oxen on, drew a long deep furrow from the house right up to the field for their beloved little sister to follow. They ploughed the field in high spirits, and their work went well as they thought of their sister who should come soon and bring them some food, not too hot and not too cold, just right to enjoy a good helping. As anyone knows, food in the field is much more tasty than at home. When you sit on the grass, and the breeze blows round, your appetite increases.

The brothers kept looking along the furrow until they were tired, and the more time passed, the more eagerly they expected their sister.

But things do not always turn out as we wish. While the sun shines from one side, shadows fall from the other.

Not far from their field was the estate of a drogon, so old that his hair had turned as white as snow, and as gloomy as late autumn. It so happened that this foul dragon heard that the girl was going to the field and he decided to kidnap her and to make her a servant in his castle. He set out and went to the top of the hill and began to stamp out the furrow. In some

places he flattened it, in others blasted it with the breath of his nostrils, in yet others he levelled the furrow with his tail, and when he came to the outskirts of the village he set down a plough with a copper share from his back, and made a deep furrow straight towards his estate. The girl came out of the village and walked along the furrow, but instead of coming to her brothers, she came to the ugly old dragon, who seized her and took her to his castle. There he locked her up, and from day to day the dragon gave her harder and harder work to do, and tormented her more and more. In the evening the sons returned home from ploughing. They were full of sorrow, like their mother, when they found out that their dear sister was lost without a trace. They all sat and thought it over what to do and where to go? Night fell and they still could find no way out. At dawn next day the elder lad took some food with him and set out to find her. He went off along the furrow following his sister's footmarks, sometimes clear, sometimes faint in the soft dust.

Like a piece of wood carried down-stream by a river and lost, the lad was lead by the dragon's furrow not to a happy life, but to gloomy death. Nobody stopped him on his way. The further he went, the quicker he stepped, as he saw the fresh footmarks of his sister. When he came to the end ot the furrow he found himself on the dragon's estate. Not far ahead was a garden with high trees, that looked like a forest. In the middle of the garden there was a gilded palace, decorated with precious stones, which seemed to burn in the sunshine. The lad strode on straight to the palace, full of courage, but when he entered the garden a girl's voice cried to him:

"My good lad, my good lad,
Stop before your luck turns bad!
In the garden do not go,
Or you will be sorry, I know.
If the dragon sees you there
He will take you to his lair,
There he'll kill you, like a fly,
You will die, and so will I!"

The lad looked round and saw his sister before him. She also recognized him and came towards him with a sad face and eyes full of tears.

"Go home, dear brother! The wicked dragon will come soon and if he meets you, he'll kill you."

"Sister dear, sister dear,
Come with me, away from here,
Since the day you disappeared
From the sky clouds never cleared,
Sorrow struck us from the start,
And has gripped us by the heart!"

"Let's go," said the girl, and she took his hand to run out of the garden. But they had not run even three steps when the dragon's club fell in front of them. It was such an enormous one that it blocked their way, and they could go neither to the right nor to the left. Soon after that the ugly dragon himself came along, roaring in a thunderous voice:

"Well, my lad, shall we fight or feast?"

"Let's start battle then,
As befits brave men,
Not sit down to dine,
Guzzling enemy's wine!"

Then the dragon glanced at the sword he had at his side and cried aloud:

"Sword of sudden death,
Come out of your sheath,
Before the foe draws breath
Cut off his legs beneath!"

The sword sprang out of the sheath, whistled in the wind, and cut off the lad's legs. Then the dragon took his club, twirled it around and hurled it over his palace and garden to the end of his estate. Afterwards he threw the lad and his legs into the deep pit made by the club.

Some time passed by, and sorrow and anxiety, but most of all the mother's tears, sent the second brother out on the same road along the turned furrow. He walked and walked all day, found the deep pit made by the dragon's club, and at last reached the garden. Just as he was about to enter, a girl's voice cried:

"My good lad, my good lad,
Stop before your luck turns bad!
In the garden do not go,
Or you will be sorry, I know,
If the dragon sees you there
He will take you to his lair,
There he'll kill you, like a fly,
You will die, and so will I!"

The lad turned his head and saw his sister. She also recognized him and came towards him with a sad face and eyes full of tears and said:

"Oh, brother, dear brother, go home! The wicked dragon will come soon and if he meets you, he'll kill you!"

"Sister dear, sister dear,
Come with me, away from here.
Since the day you disappeared
From the sky clouds never cleared,
Sorrow struck us from the start,
And has gripped us by the heart!"

They had taken only two or three steps, when the enraged dragon stood before them.

"Stop, my fine fellow, and answer: shall we fight or feast?"

The lad answered at once:

"Let's start battle then,
As befits brave men,
Not sit down to dine,
Guzzling enemy's wine!"

The dragon ordered his sword:

"Sword of sudden death
Come out of your sheath,
Before the foe draws breath
Cut off his legs beneath!"

The sword sprang out of the sheath whistled in the air and cut off his legs above the knees. Then the dragon bent and threw him together with his legs into the same deep pit.

The sister's sorrow was already great, but now it became even greater. She became dark with grief and woe. Every day she went stealthily with a bundle in her hand, and with tears of blood in her eyes, threw some food to her brothers in the pit.

Their mother was left waiting and waiting for at least one of her children to return. Once it chanced that when she was passing a well she stopped to drink some water. Having quenched her thirst she sat on the flint-stone edge of the well to rest and there she felt that she was going to have a baby. Before long she gave birth to another son, a fine handsome lad, who grew very quickly. In one day he grew as much as other boys in a year. The woman named him Fearless Flint after the flint-stone by the well. In a week or two he was already playing out of doors with twelveyear-old boys, and nobody could match him for strength.

Once some men seeing how brave he was in comparison with the other boys, spoke among themselves:

"If this one goes, he'll surely find his two lost brothers and his sister."

Fearless Flint heard the men's words and ran off home, and asked his mother:

"Mother, have I two brothers and a sister?"

The mother's face suddenly saddened, and she slowly answered him:

"No, Flint, you have nobody, my son."

But when a mother deceives her child she suffers greatly. Flint saw his mother's suffering face, and believed what the men had said.

One fine day when he was hunting, he saw an iron rock. "It would make a very good mace," he thought, and carried it off to a blacksmith.

The blacksmith made him such a mace that twelve people could not lift it into a cart. Fearless Flint took it home and when he hurled it up into the air it flew beyond the clouds, so that nobody saw it. Then he entered the house and said to his mother:

"Mother, I'll go to bed to have a rest, but when you hear my mace come whistling down wake me up."

He slept for three whole days and three nights. On the fourth day his mother heard something whistling in the sky, and woke him up. He went

out of the house and caught the mace. He tested it across his knee and it bent.

"It must be tempered still harder," he thought, and took it back to the blacksmith. While the blacksmith was tempering the mace, he called his mother and began to tell her:

"Mother, while I was sleeping I dreamt that an old man came to me and told me that if you got down in the cellar under the house and gave me from there some of your baked flat cakes, they will treble my strength."

What won't parents do as to make their children stronger and more beautiful? So, although the cellar was extremely low, down she went. Fearless Flint took hold of the house by one corner and raised it a little. His mother managed to get down into the cellar, took some of her baked flat cakes and wanted to give them to her son. But Flint began to lower the house down on his mother's back. When the poor woman was quite out of breath she gasped:

"Flint, Flint what are you doing?"

"Tell me mother, have I any brothers or sisters?"

His mother began to groan and cry:

"Yes, dear son, you have two brothers and a sister."

When she came out of the cellar she told him how they all three had gone off and never returned.

"If that is so, bake me some flat cakes kneaded with your tears, and give them to me, and I shall go out into the wide world to find my brothers and my sister."

Mother put some flour into a trough and while she was kneading it she wept.

When she had baked the flat cakes he started off along the furrow to follow his brother's footsteps. He walked and walked for a long time, went around the deep pit made by the dragon's club and at last came to the garden. Just as he was about to enter a girl's voice cried to him:

"My good lad, my good lad,
Stop before your luck turns bad!
In the garden do not go,
Or you will be sorry, I know,
If the dragon sees you there,
He will take you to his lair.
There he'll kill you, like a fly,
You will die, and so will I!"

Flint stopped, and when he saw that wretched tear-stained tormented girl, he pitied her, and offered her a piece of the flat cake to eat. The girl took one bite, and knew at once that it came from home. So she asked him:

"Who gave you this flat cake?"

"I brought it from home. My mother gave it to me."

"That cannot be! This flat cake is baked by my mother and no other!"

"Then you must be my long-lost sister!"

Then Flint began to tell her how his mother had seen off her three children — a daughter, and two fine sons, who had gone to find her.

"After they left", Fearless Flint went on, "we never heard a word about them. Poor mother remembers only the day of their departure, but nobody can say the day of their returning."

"I am the daughter who left home and walked along the furrow, but a dragon seized me and kept me as a servant in his castle, and my brothers came to seek me. We met each other, but we couldn't return home, because the wicked dragon wounded my two brothers, and threw them in a pit, as good as dead.

"Dear sister, let us run away."

"If you are my real brother, return home quickly and take care of our mother, because I don't think she will ever see us again. Whenever I tried to run away, I hadn't managed to take three steps before the dragon stood before me. He beat me cruelly and sent me back."

"How shall I know this dragon?"

"Whenever he meets a stranger he asks him: "Shall we fight or feast?" if he answers "Let's fight," then the dragon cries to a sword he wears at his side:

"Sword of sudden death,
Come out of your sheath,
Before the foe draws breath,
Cut off his legs beneath!"

That was how he almost killed my two brothers and threw them into the pit made by his club. If anybody says: "Let's feast," then the dragon takes him to the palace, invites him to table, where there are three roasted oxen, a barrel of wine and a cart-load of bread, and they sit down to eat. The dragon has the habit of breaking the remaining bare bones on the head of his table companion, so that he can suck their marrow. If any one survives the blows from the oxen's thigh-bones, he is doomed to death all the same, because after they have feasted, the dragon says:

"Sword of sudden death,
Come out of your sheath,
Before the foe draws breath,
Cut off his legs beneath!"

Just as she finished telling him about the dragon, a terrible dark cloud appeared in the sky, and it began to thunder and to lighten. Then the dragon's club came whizzing out of the cloud straight down upon them. Fearless Flint caught it with one hand, whirled it round his head and hurled back where it had come from. The cloud grew even darker and the thunderous voice of the dragon was heard roaring:

"Hostile guests are waiting for me!"

Just then a whirlwind swept away the top of a hill where it passed, and out of it appeared the dragon.

"Well, my fine fellow, shall we fight or feast?" he roared.

"Let's feast, then fight."

They went into the palace, where the dragon placed three roasted oxen on the table, a barrel of wine and a cart-load of bread, and they began to eat. After the dragon had gnawed a thigh-bone bare, he took it by one end and brought it down bang! on Flint's head. But he met his match there! Flint gnawed a thigh-bone clean as well and crack! he struck the dragon between the eyes. It was such a dreadful blow, that the dragon saw stars. While he was still rubbing his eyes, Flint came up behind him seized his sword from its sheath, put it over his knee and snap! broke it into two, and then into four parts, which he threw against a rock with such force that they were reduced to dust. The dragon cried for his sword to kill Flint, but the sheath was empty. When he saw that his plan had failed, he went out of the palace into the courtyard and roared:

"Let's fight on the copper threshing ground."

They went to the copper threshing ground, which had been made by ninety-nine serpent copper-smiths in ninety-nine days and ninety-nine nights, and there they began to fight. First they struck each other with their maces, but they broke. Then they began to wrestle, since that was the best way to see who was stronger and who would win. Rocks were overturned, hills came tumbling down, trees crashed to the ground and from the clouds terrible thunder was heard, as the furious fight between the wicked dragon and Fearless Flint went on. They fought and fought until they were exhausted and their legs gave way.

They were so hot that a bluish-grey flame came from the dragon's mouth, while from Flint's there came a greenish one. While they were lying and getting their breath back, a falcon began to fly round high up in the blue sky above them. When the dragon saw it he cried as loud as he could:

"Falcon, falcon bold,
Bring me water cold,
From the Danube blue
In a cask or two,
To quench my burning thirst,
If not, then fear the worst.
For if you bring no cask,
Refuse me what I ask,
Then falcon, you I'll kill,
And all your kin as well!"

The falcon still went circling round over head, as if it had not even heard him.

Then Fearless Flint looked up and called:

"Falcon, falcon bold,
Bring me water cold,
From the mountain spring!
If one flask you bring
To quench my burning thirst,
I shall thank you first,
Then give you what you wish —
A mound of dragon's flesh,
And you and all your kin
Can come and feast on him!"

The falcon flew down to the earth, went to the spring and soon returned with a flask full of water in his claws, and gave Flint some to drink. After that it sprinkled him all over to cool him. Flint regained his strength at once, got up, seized the ugly dragon and then hurled him down so heavily on the ground, that he broke every bone in his body, and that was the end of him.

The sky became clear, the sun shone brightly, and a light breeze brought with it the sweet smell of field flowers.

Fearless Flint set out for the palace, and there he took his sister by hand and said:

"Let's go home now. The accursed dragon won't stop you any more!"

The girl took a few steps and then began to weep.

"Oh, dear brother, I can't go home and leave my two brothers behind."

"But where are they?"

"They are lying in this pit. The dragon cut their legs off and threw them there."

Flint went down into the pit, and soon came out with the two brothers in his arms. They both held their legs in their hands, and were very lean and pale. When Flint got them out of the pit he laid them on the green grass, looked round over the fields and went off to the east. He walked for the whole of a summer day, over hills and far away, and at last he met an old woman.

"Good day to you, grannie!"

"How do you do, young fellow! And where are you going?"

"I'm looking for the waters of revival and life."

"In this valley full of springs it won't be easy to find the water of revival and life, as there are scores of springs here, and almost all are poisonous."

Flint stopped and thought for some time. The water bubbled forth here and there but who could tell which was good and what was bad? One might taste the spring and have good luck, or one might drink and bid farewell to life.

Flint went along the valley still looking at the springs until he came

to a cluster of flowers which he began to pick. When he had gathered a big bunch he went along the valley from where the springs welled forth, and as he passed each spring he dropped one flower in it. He did so until all the flowers were finished and there were no more springs. Then he returned down the valley and to his great surprise saw that all the flowers had withered and wilted. Only in one spot in the middle of the valley he found two living flowers. One of them had opened its blossoms more fully, and the other one had already grown roots into the earth. He took two pitchers and filled one with water from the first spring, and the other with water from the second. After that he hurried back without a single stop. When he reached his brothers, he put their cut legs in their places and sprinkled them with water from the first spring and the flesh joined together. Then he sprinkled them once more with water from the second spring, and the two brothers stood up, as though nothing had ever happened to them. Then joy was boundless. They embraced and kissed each other, and all four set out for home.

As after the dark, cold night, the morning sun warms the whole world again, so their mother's soul was filled with affection and happiness, when she saw her four children safe and sound at home. Later on each of them built his own house, planted a garden, cooked their soup, and lived happily for a very long time. And if they have not died meanwhile, maybe they are alive till this very day.

THE NAMELESS WARRIOR

Once, when I was in the Moldavian town of Faleshti, I heard a tale, which impressed me deeply. I don't know if it was true or not, but still I decided to retell it to you.

Once upon a time, there was a man who had three girls. They lived well, even very well as long as it was peace. But it happened so that one day a great war broke out. The Emperor wrote and sent epistles all over the empire, trumpeters made it known during three days and heralds were sent to gather people to go to the battle.

And the turn came for the man with the three girls to go too. He began preparations for the army. The eldest daughter saw him preparing for the departure and asked:

"Where are you going, father?"

"I am going to the battle, my dear daughter. I wasn't lucky to have a son. He would have to go instead of me."

"Father, let me go."
"No, my dear daughter. The girls must stay at home."
"No, I shall get ready at once, and I'll be off."
She put on warrior clothes, took a sword, mounted a horse, said good-bye to everybody and set out.
What did her father do? He put on some skins, some unbecoming clothes to look like a horrible bugaboo. Then, going a side way, he came to a bridge before his daughter got there.
At his sight the horse got frightened and began to snort, while the girl returned home frightened to death.
Her father, unnoticed by anybody, came home a side way before her, and when she appeared, he asked her:
"Well, my dear daughter, have you already been at war?"
"A bugaboo, who frightened my horse, blocked the way and I returned home."
Father started his preparations anew. The second daughter came up to him and asked:
"Where are you preparing to go, father?"
"To the battle, where else could I go? I wasn't lucky enough to have a son, who could join the army now. All the three of you are girls, and, as it is known, the girls are not called by the Emperor to fight."
"Well, I shall go, father..."
"How could you go if your elder sister didn't manage to..."
"Don't worry, I'll go, I'll set out at once."
She put on military clothes, took a sword, mounted a horse, said good-bye to everybody and was off.
The father dressed as a bugaboo again, went along a side way, got to the bridge, and came out from under it before his daughter.
The girl's horse began to snort, raised his front legs and recoiled. The girl got frightened, turned the horse back and began to whip it to run home as quickly as possible.
Her father came home a side way and met her with the question:
"Well, my dear daughter, have you already joined the army?"
"A bugaboo appeared before me, the horse got frightened and I returned."
"Hm, it seems to me that I knew how it would happen."
He began to prepare for the third time. While he was preparing, his youngest daughter noticed it.
"Father, where are you preparing to go?"
"I am going to the battle, dear daughter, as I wasn't lucky to have at least one son, who would go instead of me..."
"I shall go to the battle, father!"
"If your elder sisters didn't go, how can you?.."

"I ask you for only one thing — let me go. Why don't you want to fulfil my wish?"

They argued for rather a long time, and then she made her father give in and let her go.

The girl began to prepare for her trip. She got into the attic and looked for the sword, the soldier clothes, the saddle, which their grandfather had used, took them down, shook them of dust, cleaned them and then went to the herd of horses to choose one. The girl took a tray of red-hot coals and put it among the horses, but none of them looked at it. Only one of them, as lean as a bag of bones, came up to it and began to eat. The girl tried to drive the horse away, but it said:

"Don't chase me! Take me and I'll be your guide and adviser."

Then she put the bridle on its head and the saddle on its back.

The horse went on:

"Mistress, let me walk around the house to shake off the old hair so as to have on young hair of a three year old colt.

The girl let him go, and when it returned, it said:

"Now let me go to the forest to graze my grass and to drink my water for three days.

From today on I'm the riding horse
For you, the brave warrior, of course,
And whatever in battle you'll intend,
I'll be your helper and for you I'll stand."

The girl let the horse free to go. It went to the forest and grazed grass in clearings and drank water from springs for three days and nights running. On the fourth day it returned strong and nice, ready to fly to the clouds, and said:

"Do you want to go as the thought or as the wind?"

"If we go as the thought, we shall be lost. Let's better go as the wind to shake the earth."

The girl said good-bye to everybody, mounted the horse and set out in a quick trot.

The father again dressed as a terrible bugaboo, went to the bridge a side way, and appeared before her.

The horse began to snort, while she struck it with the whip.

"Now then, horse, you aren't afraid of flies!"

The horse went further, and she took the sword to strike.

Her father cried:

"Stop, my dear daughter, it's me!"

"Well, why are you standing here?"

"I wanted to try you, if you are afraid or not. Now I see that you are courageous."

Father and daughter embraced, said good-bye to each other, he went home, she — to war.

She rode and rode until she came to a place, where she saw two numerous armies, which were facing each other, ready to prick with spears, to cut with swords and to strike with maces. She dashed upon the enemy, and began to cut with her sword in all directions. She cut and cut until only a few of them remained alive. The rumour about that spread very quickly.

The Emperor and the soldiers asked who that brave warrior was, that had defeated the enemy. There were orders that he had to come to be rewarded and presented with expensive gifts, but he did not stop for such honours. He went off and gone he was.

After that everybody began to speak about that warrior as about a very brave one but, as they did not know his name, they called him the Nameless Warrior.

The girl rode unbeaten places and heard a loud shout. When she came

nearer, she saw a Dragon, who was eating a Stag. Both of them shouted. The Stag shouted that the Dragon was eating him, the Dragon — that he could neither swallow the Stag, because of his horns, nor let him go.

The Stag cried:

"Nameless Warrior, kill this Dragon and I'll give you a precious gift!"

The Dragon, in his turn cried:

"Nameless Warrior, cut the horns of the Stag, so that I could eat him, and your action will be a good one."

She asked the horse what to do, and the horse answered:

"Take the sword and cut the Dragon's joints of the mouth, as his strength is there. The Stag will be free to go, otherwise both of them will die."

What did the girl do? She raised the sword bravely and when she struck, she split the Dragon into two halves up to the tail.

The Stag got free and went to a spring to wash.

The Dragon, cut as he was, jumped high up, sent forth flames, and went straight to his old mother. As soon as she saw him, she sprinkled him with water of restoration first and then with water of life, and the Dragon became as he had been before that.

When the Dragon's mother heard about the Nameless Warrior, she sent her son to bring him to her, to see how big and strong he was.

The Dragon went off dressed, equipped and on horseback. Soon he met the Nameless Warrior and came home with him.

As they came home, the Dragon's mother recognized at once that he was a girl and said:

"My dear son, the brave lad you have come with is a girl. But, in case you want to find out for sure if he is a girl or not take him to the shops, where women's clothes are on sale. If he looks at them, you will know that he is a girl."

But the girl's horse knew about it, and told her not to look at women's clothes in the shops.

They left the house and went to the shops with women's clothes. Walking from one shop to another the girl began to reproach the Dragon:

"You dog of Dragon, why do you take me only to shops with women's clothes? Take me to men's and soldierly clothes."

The Dragon came home angry with his mother.

"You are my mother, and you do your best to cause me troubles!"

"The Warrior is a girl, my dear son, but she is very clever, if nobody helps her. While I get the dinner ready, take him to the Dniester river to bathe. If he doesn't want to bathe, then he is a girl for sure."

The Dragon went to the Warrior and said:

"Let's go to the Dniester river to bathe, brave lad!"

The horse told the girl:

"When you go to the Dniester river, take me as well, as the Dragon will invite you to bathe. He doesn't believe that you are a lad. He will tell you to take off your clothes. You will have to pretend that you take them off, then I'll begin to skip. You will try to catch me and, in such a way, you will get off."

They went to the Dniester river. The Dragon told the Warrior to take off his clothes first, while the Warrior told the Dragon to do it.

Well, the Dragon undressed first and got into water. The girl began to undress too, but then the horse began to skip.

"I'll go and catch the horse!"

She ran and ran until the Dragon angrily did not see her. The Dragon came out of the water and went home angrily:

"You are my mother, and you do your best to cause me troubles!"

And he told her how everything had happened.

"He is a girl, my dear son, but he is very clever, if nobody helps him. Now do one more thing, as I tell you. Ask him to sleep in our house. Take a bunch of basil and put it under the bed-clothes. If the basil is wet in the morning, he is a man, if it is withered, he is a girl.

The horse knew the words of the Dragon's mother and told the girl:

"Ask for a pitcher of water for night, and in the morning, when you get up, wet the basil, he would put under your bed clothes."

The Dragon came and asked her to spend that night in their house.

"I shall, but I ask you to give me a pitcher of water, as I drink during the night."

The Dragon put a bunch of basil under the bed-clothes and brought a pitcher of water.

She went to bed and when she got up in the morning, she found the basil withered. She took it, wetted, put back under the bed-clothes and went out.

The Dragon ran quickly and found the basil wet. Then he ran to his mother and cried:

"You are my mother, and you do your best to get me into troubles!" and he showed her the wet basil.

"She is a girl, my dear son, but she is very clever, if nobody helps her."

The Nameless Warrior mounted the horse, said good-bye to them and set out for home.

When the girl was gone, the Dragon's mother told her son to prepare a full cart of distaffs and to go to sell them. While at her house, the girl get into the cart to choose one, but after that she would not be able to get out of it and he would have to start quickly for home.

The Dragon loaded a cart with distaffs and went off. Passing from one village to another, he came to the house of the man, who had three daughters.

The eldest daughter asked:
"What have you in the cart?"
"Distaffs! Distaffs!"
"Let me have a look at them."
"Get into the cart and choose whichever you like."
The eldest daughter got into the cart and said:
"They are not good for spinning."
Soon after that the second daughter came and asked as well:
"What have you in the cart?"
"Distaffs! Distaffs!"
"Show them to me!"
"Get into the cart and choose yourself."
The second daughter got in and said:
"They are not good for spinning."

At last the youngest daughter came, and she asked as well what he had for sale in the cart.

"Distaffs!"

"Let me see them."

"Get into the cart and choose yourself."

The girl got into the cart and the Dragon started for home at once.

Father, mother, her sisters ran behind the cart, but they saw her raised high in the sky. They all cried behind her:

"You must not speak for nine days there!"

She heard what they had said, but it seemed to her that they had told her not to speak for nine years.

When she was brought to the Dragon's house, they addressed her, but she wouldn't say a word...

One day the Dragon's mother told her son:

"What a dumb girl have you brought into the house? She is beautiful, but she has no voice."

The son answered:

"Maybe she is ashamed, she will speak later on."

After some time, seeing that she was silent, the Dragon's mother said to her son:

"My dear son, don't trouble! I shall send her on a visit and she won't come back any more."

Then they began to prepare for the wedding party. The girl understood everything but did not speak.

The Dragon's mother said to her:

"You have to go to Old Hag to bring a silk sieve and a wire one to bolt flour for the wedding party."

The girl took three flat cakes and set out. She heard how the Dragon's mother said behind her:

"She won't return from where we are sending her."

When the girl left, she walked and walked through many places, through green forests and blossomed water meadows until she came to a house. She knocked at the gate. Mother Friday came out with a small dog and said:

"If you are a good person, approach our hut, but if you are an evil one go away, otherwise I'll let this small dog, which is of iron and has steel teeth, free and it will tear you to pieces."

"I am a good person, mother, a good person."

The girl entered the hut and asked:

"Dear mother, don't you know where the road to Old Hag is? The Dragon's mother has sent me to bring her a silk sieve and a wire one to bolt flour for the wedding party."

"She hasn't sent you to do you good, but to kill you. Here is a kerchief, take it! In case of hard times it will be of use for you."

Mother Friday showed her the road and the girl went further. She walked and walked a long way and for a long time when she came to mother Saturday.

She knocked at the gate. Mother Saturday came out with a small dog and said:

"If you are a good girl, approach our hut, but if you are a bad girl, go away from our hut, as I have this small dog with an iron body and steel teeth. If I let it free, you'll be torn to pieces."

"I am a good girl, mother, a good girl."

They entered the house and the girl began to speak:

"The Dragon's mother has sent me to Old Hag to bring a silk sieve and a wire one to bolt flour for the wedding party."

"The Dragon's mother has sent you not to do you good, but to kill you. Take this brush. In case of great trouble it will be of use for you."

She gave her the brush and showed her the road.

The girl walked and walked and came to mother Sunday. She knocked at the gate, mother Sunday came out with a small dog and spoke in the samy way:

"If you are a good girl, approach our hut, but if you are a bad girl, go away from our hut, as I can let free this small dog with the body of iron and the teeth of steel, and you'll be torn to pieces."

"I am a good girl, mother, a good girl."

They entered the house and mother Sunday asked her where she was walking to and what she had come for.

"The Dragon's mother has sent me to Old Hag to bring a silk sieve and a wire one to prepare for the wedding party."

"My dear girl, she has sent you to carry out a difficult task. The Dragon's mother has sent you not to do you good, but to kill you. I shall

help you. Take this box, hide it, and in case of great troubles it will be of use for you."

She gave her the box and showed her the road to Old Hag.

The girl thanked mother Sunday, and went further through vast forests, crossing wide and frothy waters until she came to the house of Old Hag. When she approached the house, she heard how the old woman was beating a drum in the house.

She opened the door, and when the old woman saw her, she jumped up with joy.

"Dear little girl, who has sent you to me?"

"The Dragon's mother has sent me for the silk sieve and the wire one to bolt flour for knot-shaped bread, to prepare for the wedding party."

The Old woman said:

"Here, come into the house and aunt will give you the sieves."

The girl entered the house and sat at table. Old Hag continued:

"While I go to the pantry to bring the sieves, you have to beat the drum."

But she did not go to bring the sieves. She went to sharpen her teeth to eat the girl. And, in order to keep her there, she made her beat the drum, so that she would know if the girl intended to run away.

While the girl was sitting at the table, she heard a mouse walking in the house. The mouse squeaked and said:

"Squeack, squeack, squeack, beautiful girl, take the sieves, which are hanging there and go home, because the Old Hag is sharpening her teeth in the neghbouring room and will come to eat you."

The girl continued to beat the drum.

The mouse said:

"Leave it to me! I shall beat the drum. Take the sieves and run home!"

The girl took the sieves and ran as quickly as she could.

The mouse continued to beat the drum. Old Hag hearing the drum, went on sharpning her teeth.

When she returned into the house, the girl was gone and the sieves as well. The mouse threw the drum and ran into his hole.

Old Hag was so angry, that she began to dig for the mouse. She dug, and dug, and dug until the house tumbled down, but she did not find the mouse.

Then Old Hag started to run after the girl. She was sweeping along and crying behind the girl:

"Stop, beautiful girl, return the silk sieve!..."

The old woman ran and ran and she was ready to catch the girl. When the girl looked back, she saw that Old Hag stretching her hands to seize her.

The girl threw the brush behind her and it turned into a thick, dark

forest. Old Hag could not pass through it. Neither could she take a round way, as it required much time. So she began to gnaw the trees.

She gnawed and gnawed, until she made a narrow path, to be able to pass, and again she started running after the girl. Old Hag was running very angrily, reproaching the girl.

"Stop, girl, by your own will! I shall only take the sieves. I shall not eat you!"

But the girl ran and did not believe her. Again Old Hag was ready to catch the girl. The latter threw the kerchief behind her and a wide river appeared. It was so wide that the opposite bank was not seen.

Old Hag could not cross it. She began to drink the water. She drank and drank until the river became shallow and she could cross it.

Then she began to run after the girl again. She was reproaching her and crying:

"Stop, girl, by your own will! I shall only take the sieves. I shall not eat you!"

The girl ran ahead. For the third time the Old Hag was ready to catch her. The girl threw the little box behind her. The little box turned into a high mountain. It was so high that the old woman could neither cross it, nor take a round way.

The old woman began to gnaw the stone at the top of her speed. She gnawed so that only one fang remained in her mouth. But she continued to gnaw, until a plate as thin as the glass remained, but she had no more teeth to gnaw it with and went back home.

The girl ran and ran until she came at the Dragon's mother. The Dragon and his mother were astonished that she had returned alive from Old Hag and even had brought the sieves. Whoever had to deal with Old Hag up till then, never escaped alive.

At that time the Dragon was preparing to celebrate his wedding party with another girl.

He was killing a goat, while his bride was preparing food in the house.

The girl entered the house and saw the Dragon's bride dirty with soot and black with ashes, bustling about with the pots at the fireplace. She stopped in the doorway and cried:

"Shoo, cat, from the fireplace!"

From those words the Dragon's bride turned into a cat, jumped out and ran away.

When the Dragon heard her speaking, he left the goat and dashed with bloody hands at her. He seized her by the neck and said:

"My dear swallow, now I recognize you, as you are the Nameless Warrior."

The girl tore herself away from his hands, turned into a swallow and flew through the window.

The Dragon wanted to catch her, seized her with two fingers by the tail, but he only pulled out the middle feathers.

From that time the swallow has the neck red and the tail split.

The Dragon remained unmarried and did not try to marry any more.

The cat and the swallow get on well together, as they both have been the Dragon's fiancées once.

CARMINEA

Of course this tale is true,
Or I wouldn't tell it to you,
It happened just so, believe me.
Those who told me
Wouldn't deceive me.

Once upon a time there was a great landlord who had enormous wealth and boundless estates. His mansion was built of precious stones and it shone at night as bright as day. Under the walls there were ninety-nine cellars all full of gold and silver. The mansion itself was surrounded by a beautiful garden with different kinds of trees. But that landlord did not value his gold, nor his mansion, nor his garden, nor his estates. His daughter Carminea who was more beautiful than the spring, was his greatest treasure. Her smile was like the sunrise, her eyes were like two morning stars, her walk was like the swaying of the wheat-ears in the wind, her voice like rippling water and the rustling of forests, and her dresses were as beautiful as the dew-dashed flowers at dawn.

When she was seventeen years old many young men knew no rest and completely lost their heads because of her. The landlord noticed all this, but did not want to marry his daughter hastily. He intended to choose a distinguished bridegroom, since there were match-makers from ninety countries, and ninety of them from each one. So the landlord came to the idea of putting them to a test. He made a ladder of precious stones from the ground up to the top of a high tower. This ladder was two inches wide and its one hundred steps were made of glass. He placed his daughter in the tower, and said to the bridegrooms:

"The one who can mount this ladder on horseback, reach Carminea, take her ring from her hand and call her by name, will receive her as his bride."

Many of them rushed to try their fortune on the ladder, but stumbled

at the very first step. Then there came a dragon who rode a lion with a tousled mane and steel claws. He mounted the ladder step by step till he reached Carminea, took the ring from her hand, called her by name and claimed her as his bride.

Then the landlord took his daughter down into the mansion, invited the dragon in, gave him his blessing and then there began such a wedding party as nobody had ever seen. Everybody had a good time, the guests were all very merry, the ugly dragon smiled, only the bride was unhappy, and she looked as sad as a wilted flower. The poor girl felt that the dragon was wicked and cruel, and she became so heavy-hearted and downcast during the dancing, that she managed to slip out unnoticed and ran to the stable to her beloved magic horse Gaitan, and there she began to weep tears of blood.

"Why do you weep, dear Carminea?"

"How can I help weeping when my father marries me to an ugly dragon, who has come from a far foreign land, and will surely be the death of me!"

"Stop weeping and don't complain, because wherever there is love of life goodness will win, and evil must yield. Tomorrow when the dragon tells you to get ready for the journey, give me a bushel of red-hot coals, put a gold bridle on my head and a silver bit in my mouth and set out with him. When you go along the road remain three paces behind him all the time. He will ask you "Why dear Carminea, do you drag behind?" You must answer that it is proper for a wife to go behind her husband. Then when he is thinking about the journey and doesn't notice, take your sword out of its sheath and keep it in your right hand at the level of his neck. Hold yourself firmly in the saddle because I shall fly forward, and the dragon will be left without his head in the middle of the road."

Carminea quietened down and entered the mansion hall where she pretended to have a lovely time. The wedding party lasted till the evening of the next day, when the dragon told her to get ready to depart. She quickly took a bushel barrel, filled it with hot-red coals, and put it before Gaitan, her magic horse, who swiftly swallowed them all up. Then the girl put a gold bridle with a silver bit on his head, the dragon mounted his lion, and Carminea mounted Gaitan, and they set out. As they were going along, Carminea remained three paces behind the dragon all the time.

"Why do you remain behind me, dear Carminea?" the dragon asked.

"It is right and proper for a wife to ride behind her husband," she replied.

Then the dragon started to go quicker than the wind, as if his lion didn't even touch the earth. Beautiful Carminea held the reins of Gaitan the magic horse, took the sword out of its sheath and kept it in her right hand

at the level of the dragon's neck, and suddenly spurred her horse forward and the dragon's head went rolling down the road. The lion ran straight on to the dragon's palace, over hills and valleys, with the headless body. The dragon's mother was gladly waiting day and night for her son to bring her home a servant. But her gladness changed into sorrow when she saw what had happened, and now she bit her nails and tore her hair with rage and fury. From that day on she kept a big fire going in a huge oven made of flint-stone, because she hated beautiful Carminea, and wished to catch her alive or dead, and burn her in the oven. The fire burnt all the year round, and the red-hot coals never went out by day or night.

Meanwhile the dragon-mother ran up and down the wide world mad with rage to catch Carminea, but she couldn't find her anywhere.

The beautiful girl in her bridal dress put her sword into its sheath and rode Gaitan the magic horse up-hill and down-dale, through forest and vale and at dawn on the second day she arrived at a large village. It was Wednesday, and there was a great market there, and crowds of people from the neighbouring villages came to it. As she was tired and wanted to rest, she stopped on the outskirts of the village near the market square.

At that time in a nearby village there lived a lad named John. He was tall and good-looking, but unfortunately he hadn't managed to marry yet. If he asked a girl to marry him he was refused, and if on the other hand any girl was ready to marry to him, he didn't want to. Troubled by his misfortune he once went to a witch who read his fate from the stars, cast a spell over him with a cowry shell, and told him his luck.

"Go to the market in the neighbouring village at dawn on Wednesday, and the first person you meet, be it an old woman, an old man, a young man or a young woman, a lad or a maid, take whoever it is home without any bitterness, and live together. That's your good fortune told by the cowry shell."

At daybreak the lad was already on the road to the market.

Gaitan the magic horse knew that John was comming and said to Carminea:

"Mistress, my mistress, put your hand into my right ear, take out some clothes and put them on."

Carminea stretched out her hand and found a pair of shepherd's trousers, a white peasant shirt with embroidered cuffs and collar, then a wide girdle as red as fire, a big tapering fur cap, and a pair of peasant's sandals — everything quite new. She quickly put them on, hid her plaits in the fur cap, and looked like a lad, upright as a fir-tree, handsome and slender.

When the stars began to disappear and the mist from the valleys began to rise to the top of the hills, John appeared in the village square.

"Good morning and good luck young fellow," said John from afar.

"Good morning," answered the other.

And without any more ado, John said to him straightforwardly:

"Come and live with me."

The other lad hesitated at first, and they argued for some time, but finally he agreed and they both went to John's village.

Just in the same way as the rays of the sun penetrate through the thick clouds, so John began to guess, either by a smile, or by a soft word, that the lad was really a girl, but he was not quite sure. This thought gave him no rest and he decided to go again to the witch.

"Granny," he began, "I have the feeling that the lad I have found at the market today is really a girl."

The old woman set fire to a small piece of coal and watched the flame, then said to him:

"If you have doubts about it, put him to the test. Go with him on horse-back to the grazing ground, and start a race. If he leaves you behind then he is a lad, if he remains behind, then he is a girl under some kind of a curse."

When John returned home he found the lad a little bit pensive and asked him:

"Would you like to take a ride?"

"Why not?"

So they rode to the grazing ground, where John stood up in the stirrups and showed him a big mound.

"Let's have a race, and see who can ride round that mount and get back here first!" Then Carminea said:

"Gaitan, magic horse, off you go," and the girl flew ahead and disappeared. John whipped and spurred his horse, but in vain, it was too slow. He lost the lad in the far distance and was afraid that he wouldn't return. When he drew near the mound, the lad came riding back towards him as swift as the wind. John whipped up his horse right and left, but by the time he had circled the mound the other lad had circled seven more, and was already waiting for him at the starting place.

John was left so far behind that he hung his head in shame. The same thought still worried him and gave him no rest, so he went to the old woman again. She set fire to another piece of coal, watched the flame and told him:

"You have in your yard two cart-loads of sticks. As you pass by them, ask him: "What could we use these sticks for?" If he is a girl he'll answer: "They would make good distaffs or bobbins for spinning." If he is a lad he'll answer: "We could make a good manger or some fine wattle fencing out of them!"

John came home and walked with the other lad by chance as it were, near the sticks.

"Look at all these good sticks I have! What do you think we could make out of them?"

"Well, brother, we could build a good manger or make some fine wattle fencing to go round the house."

John couldn't believe his eyes or his ears, and went again to the witch, who when she heard what had happened, said:

"Go into the house and put out some embroidered towels, some balls of wool, and one or two hanks of wool, one or two hanks of yarn near your sword, bow, spear and mace, and show them to him. If he looks at the weapons first, you can be sure that he is a lad, if he looks at the embroidered towels, the balls of wool and the hanks of yarn, then he is a girl!"

John ran quickly home and did what the old woman had told him, then he invited his friend into the house to show him the things. The lad stared at the weapons, took them down from the wall one by one, turned them over, first one side then another, and said that they should be greased and asked for some tow and some grease to begin the work. As to other things he paid them no attention at all.

John left the house, and started off sadly to the witch for the fourth time.

The old woman blew up the fire in the stove, and watched the flames, then she mumbled a spell over again and again, read the lines on his palm and said:

"Go home and put a besom across the threshold. After that go for a walk with him. When you return home watch carefully what he does: if he steps on the besom or over it, then he is a lad, if he picks it up and sweeps the floor, and then stands it in the corner, be sure, he is a girl."

John did as he had been told. After they walked round the village they returned home. "Now or never," thought John, and as he was about to enter the house, he stepped with one foot on the besom. His comrade picked it up by the handle swept the floor, then stood it in the corner. John turned round at once, embraced her, and said:

"My dear sweetheart, what's your name?"

She took off her fur cap, and her long silky hair framed her beautiful maiden face, so that it glowed like the sun. Looking into his eyes with a smile on her lips, and believing they would have a happy life together, she answered:

"My name is Carminea."

Then they gave a real Moldavian wedding party, with a rich feast, music and dancing in which all the people of the village took part.

After that they lived peacefully and happily in harmony together. John was a hard working fellow, on the field from morning till night toiling away for his beloved Carminea. It so happened that after some time a

war broke out, and John was enrolled in the army so quickly that he only managed to say:

"Father and mother, take care of my Carminea, don't burden her with hard work, and be kind and take care of her. If I am lucky enough to remain alive, when I return I'll look after you in your old age and make everything in your life pleasant for you."

John went off and there was not one word of news from him, and they all waited for him like a child waits for spring.

Between two battles John managed to write a short letter:

"Dear father and mother, take care of Carminea. The war will probably soon come to an end, and I shall return home. I wish you all good health."

His old parents took care of his wife from the very day of his departure, and did not allow her even to pick up a straw from the floor. They looked after her with such care and kindness that they were ready to do anything for her.

The man to whom John had given the letter for his parents was a long time on the road, and one dark night, when he happened to pass by the dragon-mother's castle, he knocked at her door to ask for a night's lodging.

The dragon-mother opened the door and let him in. After she gave him a good supper, he went to sleep while she began to read the letter, and there she came across Carminea's name. The wicked old woman, pretended to be a good hostess, brought some old wine sparkling in the glass, and made the poor man drink. While he was in a stupor the dragon-mother burnt Carminea's letter and wrote another one instead. It went like this:

"Dear father and mother, when you get this letter, bring nineteen cart-loads of wood, make a great fire and throw Carminea into it, because I found out that she had been living with a dragon for a long time, before she married me. Soon I shall come home, and if you don't do as I ask I shall burn you too."

Next morning the man set off, and after many ups and downs reached John's parents. When they read the letter they burst into tears. Carminea heard them crying and ran in quickly, but after reading the letter she too began to cry bitterly. Then she went to her magic horse Gaitan, who neighed and asked:

"Why are you weeping, dear Carminea"?

"How can I help weeping? Such a terrible thing has happened" and she told him everything about the letter.

"Stop crying and don't grieve. Tell his parents to do as the letter says, and that when the fire is ready you would like to die together with your horse. Then ride me to the fire, put your hand into my right ear and you'll find a folded kerchief. Take it out, throw it into the fire, and gallop boldly into the flames."

With tears in his eyes the old man brought the nineteen cartloads of

wood and made a huge heap, and when he set it on fire, it began to burn and crackle and sparks flew in the sky. Carminea came up to the fire on horseback, and when the parents put their hands to their eyes, so as not to see her burning, she took the kerchief out of Gaitan's right ear and threw it into the blazing fire which went out at once as if overwhelmed by a wave. Leaping over it she flew on Gaitan through the smoke, over the clouds, and over the sun, over the meadows where rivers run, and at last came to the side of a hill and continued to trot easily on. At the beginning of a valley near a spring on the hill-side she stopped the horse, dismounted and lay down on the grass:

"Oh, my dear magic horse, Gaitan, the time has come for me to give birth to a child", she said.

"And for me the time has come to die," said the horse and fell on its side as if dead.

Carminea fell asleep at once, and when she awoke she found herself in a beautiful big castle, lying in a bed with two goldenhaired handsome sons, a nurse standing watching at her head. All this appeared thanks to Gaitan the magic horse, who could change into whatever he wished. Beautiful Carminea felt his protection even after his death. His body had become a castle with golden turrets, its walls covered with precious stones, and its silver doors encrusted with pearls. His head had turned into a table loaded down with all kinds of tasty dishes, and out of his ears and eyes had come two fierce wolf-hounds, which were watching the palace outside, his mane had turned into a beautiful orchard, where many birds were singing one of his hooves had turned into a bend old woman who did her best to help Carminea, bathed the tow boys, wrapped them in swaddling clothes and lay them near their mother.

They lived happily together for some time. The boys grew up very quickly, not day by day, but hour by hour and were as pretty as two tulips. One fine day when they were playing in the yard an old woman came up to the gate. The dogs both ran to the gate. One on this side, the other on that, and didn't let her come in. Then she said to the boys:

"Come to grannie, my darlings!"

The boys ran up quickly to the gate, and the old hag took three hairs out of one girdle and three hairs from another one, and gave them to the boys saying:

"You throw them on the neck of that dog, and you on the neck of the other one."

As soon as the boys did so, each hair turned into a thick heavy chain, which kept the dogs bound to the gateposts. Straightway the old hag made off towards the door of the castle,

With hurried steps,
With snarling lips,

With gnashing teeth,
With fiery breath,
With eyes like slits,
With tight-clenched fist,

but the dogs barked and tore themselves away from the gateposts, all the chains snapped, and just as the old hag put her hand on the door handle, the two dogs seized her and tore her to pieces. When the boys saw this they were very frightened, and began to cry.

"Mother, mother! Come quickly! The dogs have torn an old woman to pieces!"

Carminea came out of the castle and when she saw that fierce face she recognized the wicked dragon-mother, who had come by the highways and by-ways to kill her. Taking her children in her arms she calmed them down and said:

"It serves her right! As long as she lived she thought of nothing but how to be the death of us."

They did not let the old hag lay in front of the castle, but took her remains far away to the top of a high hill and left her there:

In the burning sun,
In the winds which come,
In the rainstorms lost,
In the freezing frost,
To be burnt and blown,
Wet and cold as stone,
Not a trace to show
In the sky, on earth below,
Nor in winds that blow.

Now let us return to John, too far from him we have gone. He came back from the war safe and sound, stopped his horse at the gate, and cried:

"My dear Carminea, come out to the gate, come out of the house and greet me here!"

But how could Carminea greet him, when she was far away? His parents came out and wept with joy at his coming, and told him with deep sorrow what had happened to Carminea. When he heard the bad news, and had read the letter, he turned his horse around and off he went. He travelled the country far and wide to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, but did not find her anywhere. Tired of travelling and searching everywhere, he tied the bridle to the saddle bow, and let the horse go where it wished. By chance it was the valley where Carminea's castle stood and soon the two dogs appeared at the gate. They joined the horse one on the right and the other on the left, and led him up the road to the castle door.

The children who were playing outside saw the rider and cried:

"Mother, mother, come quickly, a visitor is coming to us!"

Carminea came out of the castle, and shielding her eyes with her hand, recognized him.

"Go quickly and meet him, my sons, it is your dear father," she said.

He embraced them and kissed them all, then they sat down tegether at a rich table. They ate heartily, and began to tell each other what had happened to them. Their stories lasted for three days and three nights, until at last they fell asleep. When they woke up they found themselves lying on the bare ground with their heads upon a small mound. Looking around they saw two horses come trotting towards them. One of them was John's bay mare and the other was Gaitan the magic horse. They mounted their horses, each of them took a boy in his arms, and they started off for home.

I leapt in the saddle,
I sat on a kettle,
On a wheel then I rolled,
And our story is told.

PRINCE THEODOR AND THE MAGIC STAG

Once upon a time, it happened long ago,
Or maybe it didn't happen, how am I to know?
But this fairy tale of days of old,
Whether true or not must still be told.

nce there lived a King and a Queen. They lived and reigned for a long time, and when they began to get old a daughter was born to them. She was so beautiful that like the sunshine, she lit up the whole palace. They brought her up in a golden cradle, fed her on pigeon's milk, and took the greatest care of her, since she was the only joy in their lives. The girl was diligent, clever, and obedient, so that both of them became younger of happiness.

When the girl grew up the old parents began to thing about choosing a prince as their son-in-law, and of celebrating the wedding with a grand feast. Just then it so happened that the King lost the royal seal. If he had stood before flying arrows or spears, or beneath flashing of sabres, the King could not have been more frightened. He had reigned all his life on the throne and his hair had become white, but now anybody could defy him or even drive him away, because he had no power at all without the royal seal.

Gloomy and heavy-hearted the King, the Queen and their daughter sat together in a room and began to cry and lament over their misfortune.

"Who could save us, illustrious father?" asked the daughter.

"If we had a son he could save us from such distress." said the King." He could go to the other world and take the ring from your grandfather's hand. The sign of our royal seal is on that ring."

"Father, I shall go," said the girl.

"Give up such a thought, dear daughter," sighed the King. "Instead of drowning in some distant deep, it is better to stay here and meet misfortune all together."

"Nevertheless, father, I shall go," she replied.

And the more the King and Queen opposed the idea, the more she insisted on going, until at last they agreed, and she did as she wished. Theodora, as she was called, dressed herself in knight's armour, took a sword, a spear and a club, and having bid her parents farewell, set out on her journey. When she left the palace gates she began to think of all the roads which lay before her, between her and her goal.

She turned to the north, and after passing many mountains and ravines she came to a thick dark forest, with many kinds of trees. In the middle of the forest she heard a hissing and a bellowing, as if the depths of the earth had given way. As she came nearer she saw a hideous dragon who had seized a stag with his gaping jaws, but could not swallow him because of the horns. He frothed and seethed, and lashed with his tail, so that slivers flew from the trunks of the trees. At the same time the stag butted his horns in the dragon's mouth, and bellowed loudly so that even the leaves of the trees dropped tears of pity.

When the girl drew near both of them quietened down. The dragon snorted fumes from his nostrils, and began to ask:

"My fine young fellow, hack off the stag's horns, so that I can swallow it, and you will receive a rich reward."

The girl looked at them both, but she did not unsheathe her sword.

The stag weeping tears of blood, looked at the girl straight in the eyes and implored:

"My fine young fellow, kill the dragon and set me free. I know where you are going. You are going to the other world to fetch your grandfather's ring. Thrust the sword into the dragon's heart and I'll help you on your way."

Indeed, this was a wonder-working stag!

Theodora unsheathed her sword and cut the dragon into pieces for the wild beasts to eat, and for the birds to carry away.

The stag jumped up, shook itself, livened up at once, and began to thank the traveller most cordially.

Without wasting any time they set off together. They walked and

walked along an endless winding road, and at last came to a deep hollow at the bottom of which gaped the mouth of a cave. On entering they began to grope their way along its walls, step by step, until they came to some very old gates as black as pitch. They stopped there and the stag said:

"Go through these gates and walk straight until you come up to a castle with black walls, black doors and black windows. When you go in count ninety-nine doors with ninety-nine bolts. At the ninety-ninth door knock three times and it will open. There in the room on a table lies your grandfather's ring. Take it and return, but when passing back don't step on the threshold, otherwise you'll get no further. All the devils and phantoms will rise and catch you, put into prison on the spot and keep you in their kingdom for ever."

The girl remembered the stag's words well, passed through the gates and walked till she came up to the castle which was as black as soot, and only under the doors, and through cracks by the windows could you see a gleam of light. She entered and counted ninety-nine doors, all of them bolted. At the last door she knocked three times and it opened. Theodora went in, saw the ring on a gold tray and took it. After she came out the door closed, the bolt clicked; but while crossing the outer threshold, the tip of her sword just touched it. Then the walls of the room where the ring had been, began to burst into flames and all the demons and phantoms began to run after her, caught her, took the ring away and led her to the Evil One.

He was sitting on a throne made of spears, and was in such a rage that his eyes seemed to be of glass, and his hair stood up like wire.

"Who are you, what do you want in my kingdom?" he angrily enquired.

Theodora bowed and answered:

"I am from a near-by kingdom, King of Darkness, a relative of the King, your neighbour. As he has lost his seal, he has nothing to seal his letters with, he cannot give any orders, and cannot send any answers to the neighbouring kings. He doesn't know where to find another seal. His only hope to remain on the royal throne was to get the ring from his father's finger, for on that ring is the sign of the seal."

"You took a lot on your shoulders, my brave, young fellow, but you probably didn't know that whoever enters my kingdom never leaves it, so you'll remain here for ever, since there is only one road in but no road out."

Theodora's heart burned with despair and hatred, and she frowned and looked at him sideways. The Evil One glanced to his right, and a hundred ghosts raised their axes. He glanced to the left, and another hundred raised their swords. A little further on a great fire blazed up from underneath a big iron cauldron.

"Now, my bold fellow," sneered the Evil One, "choose whatever you like, either to be hacked down by the axes, or chopped to pieces by the swords, or to be thrown into the iron cauldron full of boiling tar. But if you are still stubborn, and want to get the ring, and return home, then you must bring me the white horse Cudalbul, which belongs to the Red King."

What else could Theodora do? She agreed to carry out the Evil One's wishes, bowed her head and assured him that she would not come back without the Red King's white horse Cudalbul.

She left the black palace and went towards the gates, where the stag was waiting for her. She told him all her troubles, and they climbed up out of the ravine, on to the mountains. The stag who knew all the highways and by-ways led her up-hill and down-dale, by forest rill and grassy vale, to the Red King's realm.

When they arrived at the Red King's castle with its golden towers shining in the rays of the sun, the stag said:

"Now, my brave, lad, go into the Red King's courtyard, and nearby you'll see the white horse Cudalbul which will be grazing freely there. Go up to it and take nothing but its bridle."

No sooner said than done...

Theodora went in, passed beyond the palace fence and found herself in an orchard with many kinds of trees. At the far end of it she saw a very fine white horse.

She came up to it, and her heart was quaking, both from fear and from the great beauty of the horse. She had one thought only to put her feet in the stirrups, and gallop off and let the whole kingdom chase after her, for nobody would be able to catch up with her.

But water where you can't see the bottom is dangerous.

Theodora put her foot in the stirrup and mounted, but when she took the bridle in her hands, the horse began to neigh and cavort and rear and buck, and soon had all the palace guards on their feet. They caught hold of Theodora and took her to the Red King.

"Your Highness, we have caught a thief." The King raised his hand:

"Wait, my warriors, I want to find out who he is. If he is a bad man, I shall order him to be hung, but if he is a good man, I shall make him my servant. Who are you, my bold fellow?"

Theodora began to tell him who she was, and from what kingdom she had come.

"And what do you need the horse for?"

"I don't need it myself, but the Evil One wants it. He ordered me to bring the horse to him, and then he will give me my grandfather's ring, because my father has lost the royal seal, and if he doesn't get the ring with the sign of the seal, he can lose his throne."

The King felt a little sorry for the young fellow, and said:

"I see that you are good and brave. If you want to take my horse, you must bring me Leonora Goldenlocks, a beautiful maiden who lives three-and-thirty lands away, beyond four-and-forty seas."

Theodora was deeply troubled and left the palace.

"Well, what's the matter, master?", asked the stag.

"I was very stupid, dear stag," answered Theodora. "The Red King caught me, and told that he would give me his white horse on condition that I bring him the beautiful maiden Leonora Goldenlocks."

"You see what happens when you don't listen to me! Such a task is as good as a death sentence. This King has sent hundreds of soldiers to their death, trying to sieze Leonora Goldenlocks, but he hasn't succeeded up till now. If you don't listen to me this time, you will pay for it with your life."

Theodora and the stag set off and walked by night and by day till they had passed through three countries and by four seas, and came at last to a hut. They knocked at the door, and the old woman who opened was nobody but Holy Wednesday.

"Where do you come from, and where are you going to?", she asked.

"We come from great troubles, and are going to still greater difficulties," answered Theodora, and poured out her whole heart to the old woman.

Holy Wednesday took pity on them, gave them something to eat, and then she made a bed for the traveller to sleep. In the morning she embraced Theodora and gave her a casket.

"Take this casket, my dear, and keep it safe because in time of trouble, it will be of great help to you."

Theodora thanked her and set off again with the stag. They walked by night and they walked by day, and over the hills and far away, till they had passed through three more countries, and by four more seas, and came at last to a hut. They knocked at the door and an old woman who looked like Holy Wednesday opened it.

That was Holy Friday.

"Where do you come from, and where are you going to?" she asked.

"We come from great troubles, and are going to still greater difficulties," answered Theodora.

Holy Friday pitied her too, for she was a very kind woman. She gave Theodora something to eat and did her best to comfort her. When the girl was about to leave, she gave her a brush and told her:

"Take this brush and keep it safe. In time of great trouble it will help you."

Theodora took the brush, thanked her and they went on further. They walked and walked by day and night, first to the left and then to the right, and crossed the borders of three more countries and the waters of four more seas, and one evening they came to another hut. They decided to stop there overnight and knocked at the door. It was opened by a woman with a kind old face. That was Holy Sunday.

"Good evening, granny!"

"Welcome, traveller!"

"Let us spend the night in your hut."

"With all my heart. But where do you come from, and where are you going to, my young fellow?"

"We come from great troubles, and are going to still greater difficulties," answered Theodora, and entering the hut she sat on the edge of a bench and told Holy Sunday her misfortune. The old woman took pity on her too, because she knew that the dew freshens the withered flowers, while kind words comfort a grieving heart.

She gave her something to eat, then made a bed ready for her to sleep. In the morning she blessed her and gave her a kerchief.

"Here, my brave lad, take this and keep it safe, for there will come a time when you'll need it badly."

Theodora thanked Holy Sunday and went on with the stag. They walked and walked through fields and trees, past many more lands until they came to another kingdom.

"Now," said the stag, "in a short time we shall come to the castle of the three witches. Leonora Goldenlocks is hidden in that castle and she is watched so carefully that not one brave lad in all the world has yet managed to take her by the hand. The witches smelt them out and tortured them all to death, so that not a trace remained of them. If you want to succeed on your venture, and not to be killed by the witches, listen closely to my words.

"In the afternoon two of the witches go hunting, while the third one, the oldest, sits in the castle and rolls and rolls a hazelnut upon a round table. Inside that hazel-nut is Leonora Goldenlocks, under a spell. You must go in on tiptoe, as she is so old that doesn't hear and cannot raise her eyelashes, and unnoticed you must change her hazel-nut for another, then leave the castle and run here as quickly as you can."

Theodora listened to what the stag said, and decided to do just so. She found a hazel-nut in the wood, and in the afternoon she crossed one more hill, and one more valley, and came to a beautiful castle shining in the sunlight. Extremely frightened Theodora stepped over the threshold and inside she saw a skinny old woman, rolling a hazel-nut to and fro on a round table.

Theodora crept up behind her and watched for the moment when the old woman rolled the hazel-nut from one hand to the other, then quickly siezed it and put another one in its place. She ran out so quickly that her shadow did not even fall on the ground.

"Have you taken the hazel-nut, my brave lad?"

"I have, dear stag."

"Then let's make off quickly. When the witches find out they'll try to catch us."

They began to run till they could scarcely breathe since there was no other way of escape, and they soon left the witches' castle far behind them.

But not all the water in the streams reaches the sea.

The witches returned from hunting, and when they entered the castle they said, as they usually did: "Hazel-nut, open!" so that Leonora Goldenlocks should change back into a maiden, take the game they had caught, and roast it for supper. But how could the hazel-nut open if it was not the bewitched one?

"Hazel-nut, open!" they screamed, but nothing happened.

The three witches began to screech at the top of their voices, but all in vain. The hazel-nut did not open, and no Leonora Goldenlocks appeared.

Their hearts were full of hate and vexation, when they knew that Leonora Goldenlocks had been taken away from them. They ran out of the castle, looked around and saw the travellers far away and the track they had left behing them. The witches were in a fury, and started to chase off after them like a whirlwind:

Where they went a-flying,
Furrows were left lying,
Trees went headlong crashing,
Sparks from stones went flashing,
Grass in flames was blazing —
Such was their speed amazing:

While Teodora was running, she noticed a dark cloud covering the sky and blackening the earth behind them. A few paces further she felt something which began to burn her back.

"They look like rain clouds, but they burn my back," said Theodora to the stag.

When the stag looked back it recognized the witches and cried:

"Throw the brush over your shoulder, the accursed witches are catching up with us!"

When Theodora did so, as soon as the brush touched the ground, it turnet into a dense forest with tall thick trees.

The witches got stuck in the forest, and pushed the trees with their shoulders and knees, but did not know which way to turn, because there were trees everywhere. They began to gnaw the trees down at ground level to make a path. They bent and gnawed, chewed and spat, bent and gnawed again, chewed and spat again, till their backs were aching, and finally they gnawed their way through.

When they left the forest behind, they dug their nails into the ground, and sent a storm-wind after Theodora and the stag.

"It's burning me badly in the back," groaned Theodora, and the stag lookel back again.

"Throw the casket behind you, the witches are again on our tracks."

Theodora took Holy Wednesday's casket and threw it behind her. As soon as it touched the ground, it turned into a huge mountain. It was so high that its top reached the sky, while its sides stretched from one side of the earth to the other.

The witches could find no way round and they had not enough strength to climb over it, so they decided to gnaw their way through it. They gnawed and gnawed the flint till their teeth worn to stumps, but still they gnawed and gnawed, until they pierced right through

the mountain. When they found themselves on the other side, they began to whirl along like ninety-nine thunder clouds, with ninety-nine lightnings.

As the running water or the flying arrow cannot stop, so the witches could not stop their crazy running. Before long they were again on Theodora's tracks. She felt something burning her back, and said to the stag:

"The heat is scorching my bones!"

The stag turned his eyes and recognized the witches again:

"Throw down the kerchief, otherwise those devilish hags will catch us."

Theodora took out the kerchief, and threw it behind her, where it turned at once into a deep wide river that made anybody who went near it shiver.

The witches turned right and left but could not cross it.

The river was dark and terrible. They began to swim, but the water was magic, and drew them to the bottom quicker than any stones.

When they saw that there was no way out, they jumped out of the water for the last time, looked after Theodora, disappearing in the distance, and in one voice began to put a curse on her:

"You, that have stolen Leonora Goldenlocks — if you are a man, then turn into woman, and if you are a woman, then turn into a man."

Immediately Theodora turned into a strong young man. The armour fitted him better, and the weapons also looked more suitable on his manly body. Now Theodora was a man, and could not even imagine that once he had been a girl. He knew that he was a lad and called himself Theodor. Such was the power of the witches' magic spell.

Free at last, and with no further cares, Theodor and the stag went on further, till they came near to his own country again. At last the stag said:

"Well, now, brave lad, say: "Hazel-nut, open!"

Theodor took the hazel-nut out of his pocket and cried:

"Hazel-nut, open!"

And what did he see? The hazel-nut opened, and out of it came a very lovely girl. She was so beautiful that when she looked this way or that, the earth became full of flowers.

At first Theodor was struck dumb, then his heart began to beat madly with love for this wonderful girl.

Though earlier the young lad had wanted to get home as soon as possible, now he thought no more about it, and said to the stag:

"Oh, brother stag. I don't need the white horse Cudalbul, nor the ring with the sign of the seal, nor my father's throne, for I can't give up such a beautiful girl to anyone!"

The stag who had decided to help the young lad, did not want to

leave him there in such a deserted place, as the lad had done him a great favour, saving him from the jaws of the dragon. So he said to him:

"Theodor, don't give everything up half way, for that is not the proper thing for a brave lad to do. I have helped you up till now, and I shall help you in future to do everything properly. When we come up to the Red King's castle, I shall turn into a girl like Leonora Goldenlocks, and instead of giving her to the Red King, you'll give me. As soon as you receive the white horse Cudalbul, leave at once without stopping anywhere. As for me, do not worry at all. I shall make my escape, slip through the eye of a needle, and catch up with you."

So they agreed. The stag turned three times head-over-heels and became a very beautiful girl, looking so much like Leonora Goldenlocks that even the sun could not tell which was which.

Since everything was now settled, Theodor said: "Hazelnut, close!" and immediately Leonora Goldenlocks disappeared inside the nut. Then they set off for the Red King's castle. After they had crossed nine empty deserts they came to the Red King's palace.

The King, who had been waiting for this occasion for such a long time, was very glad. He gathered all his courtiers and soldiers to meet them. The music began to play, and a great feast was prepared.

"Your Highness," said Theodor bowing. "I have brought you Leonora Goldenlocks. Give me now the white horse Cudalbul, so that I may complete my task and return home after such a lengthy journey."

"You shall have the white horse Cudalbul, but first let's sit at the table together, and take a rest, and enjoy the feast!"

"Your Highness, may your kindness be known to your soldiers and courtiers, but I have not a minute to spare since they are waiting day and night for me at home."

The King again asked him to stay, but Theodor did not even want to listen. He took the white horse Cudalbul, said farewell to all and wished them a merry feast, while he started for the kingdom of the Evil One.

The Red King invited all the Kings from the neighbouring and distant realms to his wedding feast.

But his joy did not last long. After the feast and dances Leonora Goldenlocks said to the Red King:

"I should like to go for a walk in the garden, and to pick a bunch of flowers."

"Let me accompany you, or let the servants do it."

"No, your Highness, I should like to go alone."

Well, what bridegroom won't satisfy his bride's wishes? Leonora Goldenlocks started to walk along the path between the roses, then she went among the trees, turned three times round, and became a swallow, which soared into the clouds, and flew away so quickly that you couldn't

even catch sight of its shadow.

Flying over high mountains and thick forests, it caught up with Theodor, and as soon as it touched the ground, it turned into a stag again.

They went on together until they came near the kingdom of the Ewil One.

Theodor kept the hazel-nut safe in his pocket and was filled with joy at the thought, but his joy would have been even greater if he could have kept the white horse Cudalbul as well, since he had a long way to travel back home.

The wonder-working stag guessed his master's thoughts and said:

"Well, my brave lad, it would suit you perfectly to have such a fine horse as this, so as not to walk such a long way home."

"Just so, brother stag, but how can we get the ring from the Evil One without giving him the horse?"

"We shall catch the Evil One in the same way as we caught the Red King," answered the stag. "When we come to his kingdom, I shall turn into a horse similar to Cudalbul. You'll have to dismount from the King's horse, take its bridle with you, and set it free to go where it wishes. Keep the bridle round your waist, and when you need the horse, just shake it three times saying: "White horse Cudalbul, come to your master!"

The word one must heed, and then comes the deed.

Theodor kept the hazel-nut in his pocket and the bridle wound round his waist, while the stag turned three times head-over-heels and became a white horse as handsome as Cudalbul. Reaching the bottom of the ravine, they entered the cave and approached the black gates, and under the doors, and through the windowcracks they saw gleams of light. As soon as the devils knew that Theodor had brought the white horse Cudalbul, they all hurried out with the Evil One leading them to meet him. They were so glad that they began to invite him on all sides:

"Well, brave lad, come with us to have a rest and enjoy a feast!"

"Take the horse and give me the ring, for I have already forgotten when I left home," said Theodor. He did not wish to enter their palace, remembering that they had wanted to hack him to pieces with axes or swords, or to put him in the iron cauldron full of boiling tar, and had sent him on such a distant journey for the white horse Cudalbul.

Before long they brought the tray with his grandfather's ring. Theodor took it, turned around and started for home.

Meanwhile all the devils gathered round the horse, while the Evil One mounted it and wanting to show off his bravery, set spurs to the steed.

The horse reared up on his hind legs and started to gallop around the courtyard. Then like lightening it passed up through the clouds, and struck the Evil One's forehead so hard on the arch of the sky, that he

saw seven worlds instead of one. His wicked mind was well shaken up, but there was still breath in his body. The horse then went down to the earth, and threw him from the saddle over its head, so hard that he sank into the ground. All the devils' hair stood up on end, since they were afraid that they would be left without a ruler.

While they were trying to pull him out of the ground, the horse turned into a small fly, and flew out of the black gates towards the light of the sun. As soon as he touched the ground he became a stag again, and when Theodor shook the bridle three times and called for the white horse Cudalbul to come, the stag had already caught up with them.

Now they set off again on their travels, and came to the dense forest with many kinds of trees, where Theodor had saved the stag from the dragon's jaws.

"From now on, my brave fellow, you must travel alone for I shall remain here in my native place."

"Don't think of it for one moment," said Theodor, "You will come with me and live in the royal orchards."

"No, my brave fellow," said the stag. "We have helped each other and passed through all the dangers of death. If you should come across hard times, we shall meet again. Just as you'll be glad to be at home in your own kingdom, so I shall be in my native places, with no danger from the dragon."

Theodor said farewell to the stag, and when he mounted the white horse, Cudalbul asked him:

"Master, how do you want me to take you home, as swiftly as the wind, or as quick as thought?"

"As quick as thought," answered Theodor, and missing Leonora Goldenlocks very much, he cried: "Hazel-nut, open!" and in a twinkling of the eye Leonora Goldenlocks appeared, young and beautiful, and bright as the sun.

It was midday when they suddenly found themselves in front of the palace. The King and the Queen came out to greet them and great was their joy at being reunited, for they had waited and wept for such a long time in deep sorrow.

When they saw the ring with the sign of the seal they forgot everything. When they found out that instead of a daughter they had such a brave son, they became ten years younger, but when they saw Leonora Goldenlocks so beautiful and charming, they at once began to prepare for the wedding party, and ordered the richest dishes and most delicious drinks.

I was at that wedding party myself, and I heard there about the brave deeds of Theodor. Maybe they were really so, maybe not, I do not know, but I have told you all I heard, and for that you have my word.

LAUREL THE MONSTER AND THE THREE PRINCESSES

It happened long ago, very long ago indeed, when the oaktree bore hazel-nuts, and the willow-tree sweet apples, and I ate them. Now the oak-tree bears small acorns, and you don't have to believe my stories.

Once upon a time there lived a King who had three daughters. The princesses grew up, each one more beautiful than the others, so that it made one's heart glad to look at them, and even the sun hid himself behind a cloud in envy.

On the very border of the kingdom, in a dense forest, there lived Laurel the Monster — the curse of the earth. He got to know about the three princesses and decided to steal them away by cunning.

While the King was waiting for the match-makers to come to ask for his daughters in marriage,Laurel the Monster turned into an old witch, came to the royal palace, and knocked on the gates. The King thought that she was a beggar, and sent his eldest daughter to give her a handful of gold coins.

Laurel the Monster had a beautiful golden apple. It looked so tasty that everybody who saw it wanted to eat it, but the apple was bewitched. When the princess approached Laurel the Monster with the gold coins, he gave her the apple as if to thank her for her kindness. But the bewitched apple jumped down to the ground, and began to roll. The girl began to run after it, and thinking that she was catching up with it each moment, she ran and ran after it without stopping. But the apple rolled towards the forest where Laurel the Monster's castle was, and the princess followed, not noticing that she was going further and further from the palace.

She ran up-hill, and she ran down-dale, she ran through the forest, she ran through the vale, and she was so lovely that the swamps became green meadows and the deserts put forth trees, and the flowers opened on her path, with golden buzzing bees.

While running after the apple she saw a well with a bird sitting on its brim. The bird started flapping its wings and begged:

"Dear girl, come and take me in your hand, and hold me over the water to drink a little, as I am dying of thirst."

But the princess answered:

"Shoo, bird, shoo! I haven't got time to attend to you! I'm afraid I shall lose sight of my golden apple."

And with that she ran on further.

When she came in the middle of the Monster's forest, the apple disappeared, the trees closed their branches overhead and the princess found herself among dark and frighful rustling bushes. She turned to the left, then to the rignt, but she did not know how to get out to the edge of the forest.

Laurel the Monster turned himself into a handsome young man, and in a moment appeared near the princess. When she saw him she began to cry.

"Brave young man, help me to get to the edge of the forest, and show me the way home."

Laurel the Monster answered:

"I cannot help you, because I don't know myself where the forest ends. I have wandered up and down it for twenty years, but I have never got to the edge. Even the birds of the air can't find their way, to say nothing of a man. If you don't want to remain here alone, come with me."

There was nothing else the princess could do, so off they went. Soon they came to a black kingdom with black grass, black flowers and a black sky, and even the sun looked like clotted blood. On a bare crag stood the Monster's castle. It was built of black stones, and was covered with raven's feathers. When they came to the gates the young man turned head ower heels and became a terrible huge monster, dreadful to look at, not only in reality, but even in dreams.

"Princess, you will spend the rest of your life here, " said the Monster.

Entering the palace he showed her rooms full of treasures:

Kerchiefs of softest silk,
Gold-hemmed and white as milk,
Shoes with buckles untold,
And dragon-scale dresses of gold.

At the far end of the palace they came to a door heavily bolted, and barred with huge padlocks.

"You may enter all the rooms, except this one", he told her. "And don't you try to deceive me!"

The girl listened to his words and shook with horror.

The days and weeks and months went by and little by little she got used to her life in that dark realm, but curiosity goaded her to find out what was in the last room. One day when the Monster went hunting, she could stand it no longer, and decided to look in.

"What is wrong if I take a peep, just with one eye? I shall not touch anything and nobody will know I've been there!"

But she did not know that the Monster told the magic apple before he left:

"If the princess enters the room, dip yourself in a cup of blood."

When the princess turned the lock and opened the door, she was so

horrified at what she saw that she did not notice how the apple dipped itself in a cup of blood and hid in a dark corner. All along the walls skinny captives and slaves were hanging in chains, and implored her:

"Unlock our chains and set us free!"

The princess freed first one, then another, then a third. She gave them something to eat and drink, and soon the blood began to flow again in their veins and their strength returned, and they cried:

"Thank you, princess, that you have freed us from Laurel the Monster's torment. Let us escape quickly before he returns!"

And off they went, and didn't even look back at the gates.

Before long Laurel the Monster returned from hunting. As soon as he entered he called the apple.

The apple jumped up and stood before him all stained with blood.

The Monster flew into a rage. He called the princess and said to her:

"So you have opened the door? Now you shall pay for your disobedience."

And with that the Monster cut her into pieces, threw them into the last room, shot the bolts and locked the door.

Some time later Laurel the Monster turned himself into a merchant. He loaded a cart with expensive materials, and passing along the road to the gates of the King's palace cried: „Silks and satins for sale!" The King sent his middle daughter with money to buy something. The merchant stopped and showed her various kinds of goods, and at last he handed her the golden apple to look at. As she stretched out her hand the apple fell to the ground and began to roll. The princess ran after the apple, and as the apple rolled and rolled, she went after it, until she did not know where she was and how far away the palace was. And as she went the swamps became green meadows and the deserts put forth trees, and the flowers opened on her path, with golden buzzing bees.

While running after the apple the girl saw a well with a bird sitting on its brim. It started flapping its wings and begged:

"Dear girl, come and take me in your hands and hold me over the water to drink a little, as I am dying of thirst."

The girl answered:

"Shoo, bird, shoo! I haven't time to attend to you! I'm afraid I shall lose sight of my golden apple."

And with that she ran on further. At last she came to the Monster's forest. The apple disappeared there, and the princess stopped at a loss, not knowing where to go, nor how to return home.

Laurel the Monster again turned into a handsome lad carrying a sword and a club, and appeared before the princess.

"Brave young lad, help me to get to the edge of the forest, and show me the way home."

"I cannot take you, because I don't know myself where the forests ends. I have wandered up and down it for twenty years, but I have never got to the edge. Even the birds of the air can't find their way, to say nothing of a man. If you don't want to remain here alone, come with me."

So the princess went with him and came to the black kingdom where there were black trees, with black snakes in the black branches ready to sting any passer-by. They went on through the black grass with black flowers under the black sky and even the sun looked like clotted blood. On a bare crag stood the Monster's castle of shining black stones, and it was covered with raven's feathers.. At the castle gates the lad turned head over heels and became a terrible huge monster, striking the earth with its tail, and pouring fire out of his mouth while he walked.

"You will live here for the rest of your life," the Monster said, entering the castle, and showed the princess lots of treasures and fine dresses, but the girl paid no attention to any of them, as her heart was trembling with terror.

When they came to the last room of the palace with seven bolts and seven locks, Laurel the Monster stopped and warned the princess:

"Remember that you are forbidden to enter this room. Don't dare even to touch the door."

The princess got used to living there after a while, but the locked door gave her no rest, and she was terribly curious to see what was in that room. One day, when the Monster was hunting, she took the keys of the door and opened it.

When she looked in she was horrified. Along the walls there were hanging many starving wretches, all in heavy chains, and fetters. They implored her to set them free. The princess took pity on them, and freed them from the chains and fetters. Then she gave them something to eat and drink, and they soon regained their strength.

"We thank you that you have saved us from the Monster's slavery and torment," they said.

Then they made their escape from the black castle and soon disappeared.

But the golden apple all unnoticed had dipped itself in the cup of blood, and hid itself in a dark corner.

Shortly after that Laurel the Monster returned from his hunting and cried at once:

"Come out here, apple, and let me have a look at you!"

The apple jumped up, all stained with blood.

When the Monster saw it he turned black with rage. He took the princess to the room, cut her into pieces, and locked the door.

Then Laurel the Monster set out to capture the youngest princess. When he came to the King's palace, he turned head over heels and became

a very handsome young lad. Then he came to the King and told him:

"I have come to ask your youngest daughter's hand."

The King was pleased to see a young prince so rich and strong, and as he didn't want his daughter to remain an old maid all her life, he decided to accept the prince's proposal, and gave orders to prepare for the wedding.

After the wedding party the young couple said farewell to the King, and he wished them success and a happy journey home, and that was the last he saw of them.

They started off and drove for a long time, until they came to a well, where a little bird was standing on the brim. The prince stayed in the coach, but the princess got out and went to the well. The bird started flapping its wings and said:

"Dear girl, come and take me in your hand and hold me over the water to drink a litte."

The princess took the little bird gently in her hand and helped it to drink. Whether the bird drank or not it was hard to see, but it said to the girl:

"Good luck be with you and strength to overcome all the troubles which lie ahead."

"But why do you say that?" asked the girl.

"I know where you are going. You are on your way to the castle of Laurel the Monster."

The girl trembled, and wanted to return home at once, but the bird told her: "Fate is fate. Go on and you will meet your sisters again. Only remember to ask the Monster for the golden apple, and when he gives it to you, put it into your pocket and then you will see what follows."

And with that the bird flew away and the princess walked back to the coach, and they drove on further.

A long, long way,
A whole summer's day,
Till the evening came,
With the sunset's flame,
And the shades of night,
Brought horror and fright.

At last they came to the kingdom of black grass, black flowers, black trees with black leaves, and a black sky, where even the setting sun had the colour of clotted blood. From there it was not far to the Monster's castle. The princess saw it from afar, all built of black shining stones, and covered with raven feathers. In front of the castle the prince turned head over heels and became a terrible Monster, and said to the princess:

"My dear bride you will live here till the end of your days."

Entering the castle the Monster showed her room after room.

Gold in hoards
And silver swords,
Diamonds, pearls,
And beads for girls,
There they lie
To please the eye.

Among the gold treasures the princess saw the golden apple and asked only for that. The Monster gave it up unwillingly, but who could refuse a young bride? Going further, they came to the last room of the castle where he showed her an iron door, bolted and locked with seven bars and locks.

"Here you must never enter. Don't unbar the door, don't unlock the locks, or you will have to answer for it."

That was Laurel the Monster's order, and off he went hunting, sometimes for a whole day, sometimes for a whole week. When he returned he always called to the apple, and seeing that it was bright and shining, he was quite satisfied. The princess sat and wondered what could be in that last room. Once she plucked up courage and decided to unlock the door. She took the keys, unlocked and unbolted the door and when she opened it she almost went out of her mind. There were her two poor sisters, all cut to pieces.

"So, this is where you both have got to! What an evil fate overtook you!"

The apple tried to jump out of her pocker into the cup of blood, but the princess caught it by the stalk and stopped it.

"You want him to kill me too, you little devil?" she cried, and quickly locked the door.

Just then the Monster returned, called to the apple, and seeing it bright and shining, he laughed with one eye, but cried with the other:

"Why are you laughing with one eye and crying with the other?"

"I am laughing because I have seen my golden apple, but I am crying because I have cut three fingers off my hand while hunting."

The girl gave a sudden gasp.

"Don't be afraid, soon I'll have my fingers back in their place. Dig under the threshold of the door, and you'll find a pitcher with living water."

The princess dug under the threshold, found the pitcher and gave it to him. The Monster poured some of the living water over his hand and the fingers joined on again where they had been before. Ordering her to take good care of the pitcher, he went off hunting on another kingdom. The princess having seen the magic power of the living water, thought she would revive her sisters. She went to the last room and unlocked and opened the door, sprinkled her elder sister with living water and she

revived, and became whole again. She slowly opened her eyes and said:

"I have slept a very deep sleep."

"You could have slept for ever if I were not here," said the youngest princess, and taking her elder sister out, she locked the door as quickly as she could.

Then they had dinner together and told all their misfortunes one to another. The youngest princess then said:

"I shall send you home. I shall put you into a chest, but you must lock it from the inside, and when you feel somebody trying to open it, you must say in a low voice:

"I see, I see, it's very clear,
Keep your promise, husband dear!"

No sooner said than done. The princess put her elder sister into a chest, placed it in a big sack and when the Monster came home she began to cry.

"What has happened, and why are you crying?"

"I dreamt that I was at home again, and now I miss the King and the Queen very much. I should like to send them a present, but there is nobody who could take it to them."

"I shall take it!"

"Will you really?"

"Prepare what you have to send and I shall take it."

"Very well, if you promise not to look into the sack to see what I have put in there. Do you agree?"

"I swear I won't look," replied the Monster.

So he took the chest in the sack and set out. He walked and walked, and after some time he put down the heavy sack, and decided to see what was in it. The princess felt him untying the sack, and cried in a low voice:

"I see, I see, it's very clear,
Keep your promise, husband dear!"

"I think that my wife must be watching somewhere", said the Monster to himself, and taking the sack on his back, went on further and at last came to the King's palace. There he threw down the heavy sack with the chest beside the gates and called:

"Your Majesty, here is a present from your youngest daughter!"

Then, tired out, he turned without waiting for any answer, and went off.

Who could describe the joy of the King and the Queen when they found their eldest daughter, whom they had given up as lost?

Some time later the youngest princes unlocked the room again and

"Your Majesty, here is a present from your youngest daughter!"

Then, tired out, the Monster went straight off home as quickly as he could. When he arrived home he called to the golden apple, but seeing it bright and shining he was satisfied.

The King and the Queen were delighted beyond words when they saw their middle daughter, whom they had also given up as lost.

Then the youngest princess thought how to get home herself.

She thought and thought and at last decided to make a dummy. She found some wax and made a dummy with a girl's face, dressed it, put rouge on its cheeks, painted on ist eyebrows, and when all was ready hid it in a safe place.

The next day the girl began to cry again.

"What has happened and why are you crying?"

"I have seen the King and the Queen again in my dreams, and I should like to send them another present."

"Another present!", cried the Monster, "All right, stop crying and put it into a sack, and when I return from hunting I shall take it to them."

"I shall leave the sack outside, near the door," said the youngest princess. "When you return don't come inside the house. I may be working or sleeping, so go off quickly and return as soon as possible."

The Monster went hunting, while the girl lit the fire and placed the dummy near it. Then she got inside a chest, which she had placed in a big sack, outside the door, locked herself in, and began to wait.

In the evening the Monster came home, saw the sack, but looked through the window to see what his wife was doing. Because of the warmth the wax had softened, and the dummy was leaning forward the fire."

"The princess is crying again," thought the Monster. "I shall go all the quicker," and he took the sack on his back and hurried off.

On his way to the palace he got tired, and often changed the sack from one shoulder on another, but did not look inside it. He decided not to stop at all, and not to look into the sack. She will only say „Keep your promise" again. He staggered on without stopping till he reached the King's palace. There he threw down the sack beside the gates and called:

"Your Majesty, here is a present from your youngest daughter!"

Remembering that his wife has asked him to return quickly, he hurried back home without waiting to see the King.

When the youngest princess climbed out of the chest, everybody was mad with joy to see her again, but happiest of all were the King and the Queen.

"Well, at last all our daughters are at home."

"Let us rejoice day and night, that we managed to escape from that black kingdom of slavery," said the youngest daughter and all of them embraced, kissed one another, and the three princesses cursed the hour when they first saw Laurel the Monster.

revived her middle sister, and having told her what to do, put her into a chest, and then inside a big sack, and again began to cry.

When the Monster came home he asked her:

"Why are you crying?"

"I am very home-sick and I should like to send something to the King, but I know that you are very curious, and that you'll untie the sack on the way to see what's inside."

"Don't worry. I shall do no such thing. Give me the present!"

Laurel the Monster took the sack on his back and off he went. On his way to the King's palace he got tired, put down the heavy sack and decided to look inside, but as he began to untie it, he heard a low voice which said:

"I see, I see, it's very clear,
Keep your promise, husband dear!"

The Monster spit with disappointment, seized the sack again and went on further. Coming at last up to the gates of the palace, he threw the bag beside them and cried:

Meanwhile he was making his way home, over mountain and vale, up-hill and down-dale, but when he got to his black kingdom and saw the palace empty, he called to the apple at once. The apple appeared bright and shining. That only infuriated him the more, and he hurled it down on the ground so hard that it broke into pieces, and his castle fell in ruins and in its place grew thorns and thistles.

Mad with rage he set out for the King's palace to seize the three princesses, but the King was prepared for his return. He had gathered his soldiers together, and they lay in wait for him, and with their long sabres they sliced him into pieces. Then they took each piece on their spears, and threw them into the Black Sea, saying:

"When the Black Sea runs dry, let the Monster revive!"

The King called together the musicians from seven kingdoms and prepared a great party to which he invited crowds of people. While dancing the three princesses found bridegrooms for themselves and the King then gave a wedding feast for all of them at once. Such a feast it was as nobody has ever seen before or since. Passers-by were welcome to that wedding feast, and sat at tables loaded down with rich dishes and fine wines. There was such merriment and laughter there, that its echo is heard in the forests up till this day.

And with that the story ends,
And I wish you farewell, my friends!

THE BEWITCHED STONE

Once upon a time there was an old woman, who had a son named John.

They lived very poorly. They had but a house with four walls and a roof to shield them from rain.

One day the son said to his mother:

Mother, give me a groat to go into the wide world to buy whatever I shall find for this house of ours."

Mother gave him a groat, and John set off. He walked and walked until he came to a plain, where some children were torturing a Puppy.

"Hey, you, why don't you let the Puppy alone?"

"That's not your business!"

"Why not? Don't torture the Puppy, he hasn't done any evil to you."

The lad pitied the Puppy and said:

"Give him better to me, and I'll give you a groat for him."

The children were very glad.

The lad gave the groat and received the small Dog.

When he came home, mother began to scold him as soon as she saw him:

"What do you need this Puppy for, John?"

"Let him be, mother, a Dog is good near the house."

Soon after that the lad again asked his mother for a groat and left the house. He walked and walked until he came to a village. There he saw some boys, who were torturing a Kitten at the edge of the road.

"Hey you, why do you torture that Kitten?"

"It's no business of yours."

The lad took pity on the mewing Kitten and said:

"Don't torture him! Better give him to me, and I'll give you a groat for it."

John gave the groat, took the Kitten and brought him home.

"Here it is what I've brought for that groat, mother!"

Mother began to scold him:

"What do you need him for? We are so poor and what will a Cat do in our house?"

"Let him be, mother: The cats are of use in the house."

"You see well enough that we have nothing to eat ourselves and still you have brought these animals to starve!"

The household enlarged with the Cat and the Dog.

Some days later, John asked his mother for another groat, and went still further.

John walked for a day, then for a second one, and on the third day he saw some boys with a small Snake. They were throwing him down and torturing him.

"Hey boys, why are you torturing the Snake? He's also a living being!"

"We want to kill him."

"What for?"

"Well, when he grows, he may bite somebody."

"Don't beat and don't torture him! Sell him better to me. I'll give you a groat for him."

The boys were glad to have a groat, while John took the Snake and came home with him.

When his mother saw him, she became flustered, lost her head and wanted to leave the house, running somewhere.

"Don't worry, mother, don't trouble and don't be afraid: I have saved this living being from death and have made a friend."

"My dear son, I feel a chill of fear, when I look at him. Now if you want to buy something else, it's impossible, as I have no more money in the house."

John went to work as a farm-hand, and got a loaf of bread and a jug of milk. He gave the bread to the Dog and the Cat, while the milk — to the Snake.

In such a way John took care of the Dog, of the Cat and of the Snake, until they became grown-up and strong.

One day the Snake said:

"I want to present you with something, as you've saved me from death and fed me for such a long time."

"What do you have to present me with?"

"Let's go to the empire of the snakes, and when my sisters see you, they'll present you with the most expensive gifts."

"You'd better sit here with me and live as long as you have to."

"Master, the time has come for me to return to my empire. Mount me to go and reward you for your good actions."

John mounted the Snake and when he took a running start, he flew over forests and clouds, over sees and countries, coming to a palace moulded of precious stones.

"One of my sisters, the eldest one, lives here in this palace. Go and tell her about me. If she says that she wants to see me, then tell her to give you the bewitched stone from under her tongue."

John went, knocked at the door and the eldest sister came out asking:

"Who are you and what news have you brought? Where have you appeared here from, a living being from the human realm?"

The lad answered:

"Where from? From that realm."

"If you have been in that realm, haven't you heard about my brother?"

The lad answered:

"I have heard about him and I have seen him. If you give me the bewitched stone from under your tongue, I'll show him to you."

The eldest sister said:

"I haven't seen him for seven years, and I may not see him for seven years more, but it is impossible to give the stone from under my tongue to you."

John came back and told the Snake about everything. The Snake got very sad.

"She is not sorry for me. Let's go to the second sister."

John and the Snake set off at once. They walked and walked until they came to another palace, where the second sister lived.

"Who is there? What news have you brought? How have you appeared here, an inhabitant of the human realm?"

"I am really from that realm."

"If you are from that realm, haven't you seen my brother or haven't you heard about him?"

"I have heard about him and I have seen him. If you give me the bewitched stone from under your tongue. I'll show him to you just now."

"I haven't seen him for nine years, and I may not see him for nine years more, but it is impossible to give the stone from under my tongue to you."

John came out of the palace and approached the Snake. The Snake asked him:

"Well, what did she say?"

"She said that she hadn't seen you for nine years, and she may not see you for nine years more, but it is impossible to give me the stone from under her tongue."

"She is not sorry for me either. Now let's go to the youngest sister."

They turned from the palace of the second sister and went further through groves and forests until they came to a palace, which was so beautiful that it was impossible to describe it.

"My youngest sister lives here. Go and ask her as well."

John went to the third sister and knocked at the gate. She came out of the palace and asked:

"Who are you? What news have you brought? Where have you appeared from, a man from that realm?"

"Well, I am really from that realm."

"If you are from that realm, haven't you heard about or haven't you seen my brother?"

"I have both seen and heard about him. If you give me what I ask for, I can show him to you."

"Ask quicker for whatever you want, and I'll give it to you, only show me my brother. Tell me what you want: herds of horses, droves of cattle, gold, precious stones, empires as large as the eyes can see..."

"I have saved him from death, I have brought him up, but you won't see him until you give me the stone from under your tongue."

"I'll give you everything you want, only show him to me!"

When brother and sister saw each other, they embraced and kissed. Then the Snake said:

"If this lad hasn't saved me, we wouldn't have met. When I was small. I got into the hands of some children, who intended to kill me. This lad has taken care of me, has fed and brought me up, so that I am as you can see me."

And they spent three days and nights in feast.

"The good action must be rewarded," said the youngest sister, taking out the bewitched stone from under her tongue and giving it to John. "Here it is, I give it to you, but you must not tell anyone what you have under your tongue. If you do, you'll be lost."

"These are made by the little stone from under the tongue. Go home and whatever you wish to fulfil, order and it will be fulfilled."

"I wish you to remain healthy!" said John.

"I wish you good health too and a good journey. When you are satisfied with anything, don't forget to say: "Table clear yourself, or that and that clear off..."

"All right!"

John made some steps and then said:.

Twelve lions from afar,
How strong, you are!
Don't stop, don"t wait,
But home take me straight:"

And when he looked around, he found himself in the yard of his house. Mother asked him:

"Where have you been for such a long time?"

"I have been in the wide world, mother, for a walk, as I am young. Maybe you are hungry?"

"No, I have eaten, dear son, how not to eat?"

And again she began to complain that he had left her and had not been at home for such a long time.

Then John stepped aside and said:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait! Make quickly a house with a table in it, to please my mother!"

When they raised their eyes, they saw a beautiful house, and a table with different kinds of dishes in the house. Now they were as prosperous as never before.

One day John said to his mother:

"Mother, go to the Emperor and ask him to marry his daughter to me."

"Poor me, John, why don't you think that the Emperor has enough bridegrooms without you? Find another girl, not to remain ashamed somehow with the Emperor's daughter."

"Go, mother, if I ask you to."

His mother couldn't help it and had to go. She took two knot-shaped loaves of bread, a bunch of sweet basil, a gourd of wine and went off. She knocked at the door of the palace and entered the Emperor's room.

"How do you do, Your Highness:"

"The same to you! Why have you come? What are you looking for?"

"I have come, Your Highness, with knot-shaped loaves of bread in my right hand, with wine and basil in the left one, as I have heard that you have a fairy, as beautiful as a garden flower, for whom the time has come to be married. And, if you want, let her marry to my son."

The Emperor took the knot-shaped loaves of bread, drank the wine and said:

He took it and didn't know what to do with it. The stone, as small as a glass bead, precious as it might be, was not of such a great use, he thought. Now he regretted, that he had not taken other wealth.

The Snake came up to him and asked:

"Do you regret it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you know what is in store for you?"

"How can I know it?"

"Good days are waiting for you. Just put the stone under your tongue and say: Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait, make a house with a table in the middle to satisfy my tastes!"

And, in a twinkle of an eye, a big table and a big house appeared before him, which he hadn't seen even in his dream.

"What are these?"

"All right, woman, but keep in mind that I shall marry my daughter to the one who will fulfil all my orders. Tell your son to make a gold bridge from his house to my palace by morrow morning. If he doesn't make it, then his head will be cut off."

The woman came home crying with bitter tears.

"The Emperor has said that and that... If you don't make the bridge, he won't give you his daughter and your head will be cut off."

"Don't grieve and don't sadden, mother. Go to bed and have a rest. Tomorrow we shall see what is what."

As soon as it got dark, John put the bewitched stone under his tongue, went out into the yard, and said:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait! Make a gold bridge from my house to the Emperor's court, such as nobody has ever seen on earth."

In a twinkle of an eye the bridge was ready. In the morning, when the Emperor got up, he saw the bridge and wondered how beautiful it was.

At the same time the lad asked his mother:

„Go, mother, to the Emperor and ask him to marry his daughter to me."

The mother took a staff in her hand, went to the Emperor and said to him:

"Has my son fulfilled the order, Your Highness?"

"He has."

"Now will you marry your daughter to him?"

The Emperor gave another order:

"Tell your son to plant by morrow morning rows of gold trees from his house up to the gate of my palace. The trees will have to bow to each other and all kinds of fruits must be in them. Grass will have to grow under them and be cool. Springs with clear water will have to flow, and gold birds will have to fly from tree to tree, singing the most beautiful songs."

The mother came all in a breath and told the lad:

"The Emperor has ordered to make that and that, to be so and so, otherwise your head will be cut off."

"Go to bed, mother, and have a rest. Don't bother too much about it."

When it was dark night, John took the bewitched stone, put it under the tongue and said:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait! Quickly plant a gold orchard from my house to the Emperor's palace! Different kinds of fruits must hang from the branches of the trees. Springs with clear and cool water must flow, green silky grass must be all around. Gold birds must fly from tree to tree and sing the most beautiful songs."

As soon as he finished to speak, everything he had wished appeared.

In the morning the courtiers and the Emperor were walking in the garden

and were amazed at such singing and the beauty they saw around.

"Go, mother, and ask the Emperor to marry his daughter to me."

The woman went again. But the Emperor said:

"Wait a little. He has to fulfil one more order. Tell your son to make a well with a gold kerb. The well must have two gold pails: one for going into it and the other for coming out of it. If he does it, everything will be all right, if not, then his head will be cut off."

Mother returned home, grieved and troubled again.

"What has the Emperor said?"

"Oh, my dear son, he ordered to make a well with a gold kerb and two gold pails..."

"Go to bed, mother, and have a rest..."

When the night came, John put the stone under his tongue, went into the middle of the yard and said:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait, to me come straight! Make a well with a gold kerb, with two pails of gold, one for going down into it, and the other for coming out of it!"

At sunrise the gold well shone, while one of the pails being filled with water and the other was being emptied out, as the Emperor had wished.

Just at that time the mother came to the palace and the Emperor happened to be on its steps.

"Good morning, Your Highness, I am glad to see you!"

"Welcome to you!"

"Are you glad that we have fulfilled your orders?"

"I am glad, as up till now nobody has been able to fulfil them."

"Shall we fix the day of the wedding party?"

"Well, from now on I am your son's father-in-law. Let him come to me and we shall decide everything about the wedding party. Out of all the fiancés who came to ask my daughter in marriage, he was the only one who fulfilled the orders."

The fiancé harnessed twelve white horses at the coach and came for match-making.

The Emperor announced the festivity all over the empire and invited everybody to the wedding party. The merriment lasted for a whole week. After the wedding party John and his wife settled down to live at the Emperor's court.

At the Emperor's court there lived a Black Arab, who hoped that John's head would be cut off, as to the other fiancés', and he would celebrate the wedding party with the princess. When he saw that the wedding party passed well, he could not set at rest. One day, when John was hunting, the Black Arab approached the Emperor's daughter and told her:

"Don't you know what your husband has, that he made the gold bridge, trees and the well?"

"I don't know. It seems to me he is so strong and brave that he makes everything himself."

"Well, try to find out in the evening what power he has, who helped him to fulfil all the orders."

The Arab went off, while the Emperor's daughter got so mournful, that she fell ill.

John returned from hunting and found her in bed. He called doctors, looked for herbs, did everything he could, but he was not able to raise her from bed. The Emperor's daughter asked him:

"Tell me, John, what do you know, whom do you have, that you make whatever you think, and don't tell me anything about it? You told me neither how you had made the bridge nor how you had made the gold trees..."

"What do you need it all for?"

"You see, what kind of husband you are, if you hide everything from your wife?"

"It is really so," thought John. "The husband must not have hidden thoughts from his wife," and he took out the bewitched stone, and showed it to her.

"This stone from under my tongue fulfils whatever wish I have."

"And where have you got it from?"

"From the empire of the snakes," answered John, and he told her the whole story about the bewitched stone from under his tongue.

Later on, when John went hunting again, the Emperor's daughter took out the stone from under her tongue and boasted to the Black Arab.

But the Black Arab only said:

"Didn't I tell you that he had something, which he was hiding from you? He is strong and brave with this small stone, which he got from the empire of the snakes. If anybody takes it, he will remain as poor as a church mouse and nobody will pay any attention to him. And you have married him! I don't know how you are going to live a whole life with him."

And when the Black Arab put his hand on the small stone he said:

"Twelve lions from afar,
How strong you are:
Don't stop, don't wait,
To me come straight!"

That very moment twelve strong lions appeared with the caps in their hands and asked all at once:

"What do you wish, master?"

"Do you see these courts? Take them together with us over nine seas and over nine countries into the empire of the Arabs."

In a twinkle of an eye they were moved to the Arab empire and only the walls and the roof of John's old hut remained in that place.

When John returned from hunting he saw that he had nothing and got very sad.

"Didn't I tell you," his mother said, "not to marry an Emperor's daughter? You see, we have remained only with our souls. They could have even taken our lives."

But the Dog and the Cat learnt about their master's troubles, came to him and asked:

"What has happened to you, John?"

"This and this has happened..."

"But where can we find the Black Arab?"

"He is far away over nine seas and nine countries in the Arab empire."

"We shall go and find him."

The Dog and the Cat set out and walked a long way, until they came to a wide river.

"Well, cross it," said the Dog.

"I can't swim," answered the Cat.

"Just so! Why have you set out with me then?!"

"Do you know what to do?" said the Cat. "I shall mount on your back and we shall cross it, as you know how to swim from your very birth."

The Cat mounted the Dog, the latter started to swim, and they crossed successfully to the other side of the river. They walked and walked and came to a long and wide ravine.

"Well, cross it," said the Cat.

"I can't jump so far. Now you have to take me in your arms."

The Cat coulld have jumped over the ravine, but with the Dog in his arms he could not even move.

"Then, why did you set out with me?" asked the Cat.

What had they to do? Again the Dog proved to be cleverer. He saw a high tree on the bank of the ravine and said:

"You have sharp claws and can climb up the tree. Take me up too, help me to climb up to the top. The tree will bend and we shall be on the other side."

Said and done. They climbed up to the top of the tree, it bent and, in such a way, they crossed the ravine.

They walked and walked further, until at once the Cat felt a smell, and found a mouse road. While walking through groves and forests, on a plane with green grass, they heard shouts and songs. A mice wedding procession was coming.

"You, Dog, go aside! These must know if a new court has appeared here in the surroundings. I'll catch the bridegroom and the bride and won't let them free, until they tell me about it."

The Cat hid behind a bush, and when the wedding party approached, he came out:

"Ho there! Long life to you, be healthy and have luck in your house!..."

"Thank you!"

The Cat looked around, caught the bridegroom and the bride and ran to the Dog.

The sponsor of the wedding party came forward and asked:

"Good Cat and good Dog, don't spoil the happiness of the young couple, please! The time has come for them to get married, a day of great joy, which can't be without one of goodwill as you are. Today is the day of their great jolly time, and it is not proper for them to shed tears. They must be cheerful and glad."

"We shall let them free and we shan't spoil your wedding party. But we want you to tell us, if you haven't seen, while tramping about here and there, a new court somewhere in the surroundings."

One of them answered in the negative, the other said the same, while the third answered:

"I do know. I have made my house there. I live there."

Then the Cat said:

"Go and enter the court. Take another mouse with you. One of you will have to stand under the bed, while the other one will have to roll his tail in peper. When the Arab and his wife fell asleep, you'll have to go and pass with the tail by his nose. The Arab will sneeze and a small stone will spring out of his mouth. You'll have to take it and bring it to us as quickly as possible. After that I'll give you the bridegroom and the bride."

The two mice started running towards the court at once. They got to the court of the Black Arab, one of them rolled the tail in pepper, and waited for the Arab and his wife to fall asleep. Then it passed with the peppered tail by the Arab's nose, the latter sneezed. When he sneezed, the small stone sprang far away out of his mouth.

The second mouse from under the bed took the stone and they returned at once.

"Here, we have brought it!"

"We wish you to be healthy and to have a good time at the wedding party."

The Dog and the Cat set off back to John, crossed the ravine and came to the wide river.

"Who will keep the small stone?" the Dog asked.

"I shall keep it," said the Cat.

"No, I'll keep it, as your teeth are rare, and you can drop it."

Then the Cat said:

"Listen, Spotty, when you are tired, you pull your tongue out of your mouth and you can drop it quicker."

The Dog agreed and said:

"Well, keep it while I swim."

The Cat took the small stone and put it into his mouth. The Dog started to swim with the Cat on his back.

When they were at the middle of the river, the Dog got into a vortex and sank into the water. The Cat took some water in his mouth and began to sneeze. He had completely forgotten about the small stone. Getting to the opposite bank, the Dog asked:

"Give me the small stone!"

"Oh, I've dropped it into the water!"

"Poor me, poor me! What shall we do now?"

They were standing and looking saddly up and down the river. Just at that moment they noticed a crawfish wedding party.

The Cat jumped into the water, while the Dog caught him by the tail. He seized the bride.

Then the bridegroom came out of the water and asked them:

"Take pity on me! I shall die if my beautiful and dear bride is not with me."

"We shall let her free, if you ask all the crawfishes to look for the bewitched stone from the empire of the snakes at the bottom of the river."

"We shall bring it!" cried all the crawfishes, who were at the wedding party.

The crawfishes started to look for the precious stone at the bottom of the river, found and brought it.

The Dog and the Cat gladly took the small stone and wished them a good time at the wedding party.

"We wish you happiness at your house, live in it from your youth till an old age!"

"Thank you!" said the bridegroom and the bride, treating them to knot-shaped bread and wine.

Then the Dog and the Cat hurried home.

"Was your trip a successful one?" John asked them.

"It was."

They gave him the bewitched stone, he put it under his tongue, stood up and cried at once:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait! Bring my houses at once, together with the Black Arab and his wife!"

He only managed to utter these words and the place became dark. The Arab and his wife were there.

And then John asked them:

„What am I to do with you now?"

"Do what you like, only don't make us wait for our death too long."

And John said as follows:

"Twelve lions from afar, by sun unseen, by rain unwet, don't stay, don't wait! Take the Black Arab and his wife to a desert where no rooster sings,

no dog barks, no man treads or lives and let them remain there for ever!"

And when he finished his speech, he did not see them any more.

After that he looked for a girl that was a match for him and celebrated a very beautiful wedding party with musicians. They were fifty all in all, but without fiddles or trombones. They played only flutes. There was great merriment at that party with rich dishes and first rate drinks.

I was at that wedding party myself and I ate and drank so that I shall remember that feast for ever.

I rode a strawberry fruit,
And told great lies to boot
To all you good folk,
Who can take a good joke!

THE GOLD CROWN

Once upon a time there lived a woman who had a boy. Year after year passed and the boy became a lad. He went already to the dance, to the sit-round gatherings, to group work as other lads did. Then the time to get married and celebrate his wedding party came. He found a suitable girl, from another village, and got betrothed to her.

One day the lad set off to his fiancée to settle everything about the wedding party. While he was walking along the road, the Emperor of the dragons appeared on the road. The Dragon opened his mouth so that one of his jaws was in the sky and the other one on the earth. Then he began to belch fire and whistle:

"Stop, lad, the time has come to eat you!"

When the traveller saw such an enormous Dragon, standing with his mouth widely open, he thought to himself:

"This is my end! There is no escape for me, but probably it is possible to ask somebody to turn him out of my course!"

And he said:

"Let me, Dragon, say some words for the last time."

"And whom do you want to say them to?"

"I want to say them to the Sun, to the Wind and to the Earth."

"All right," the Dragon said, "say what you have to, and after that I shall eat you."

The lad raised his eyes towards the Sun and said:

"Rising, all-powerful and handsome as nobody else Sun, come and give me a helping hand, to get where I set off for!"

The Sun, getting out of breath with running, asked him:

"Why have you called me with so much passion?"

"Save me from death! Turn the Dragon out of my course, to go to my fiancée! Stop him from coming to eat me!"

"I cannot make the rays chill the earth and benumb the Dragon, as it is summer time. I can do it only in autumn, in November. Now I am obliged to warm the Dragon as I warm all the other living beings on the earth."

The Sun said those words and flew up back in the sky.

The Dragon horribly dashed at the lad:

"You want to benumb me! You want to kill me! The Sun, as you see, hasn't helped you. Make a stop for me to eat you."

The traveller spoke to the Wind with a fervent entreaty:

"Come, Wind, and save me!"

Suddenly a strong and tempestuous storm began. The wind came head over heels and asked:

"Why have you called me, brave lad?"

"I've met with great difficulties, save me from this Dragon, bring an overwhelming rain, raise furious storms, turn the accursed Dragon out of my course, let him not eat me. I am anxious to get to my sweetheart to celebrate my wedding party!"

"I can't because the fields have just turned green and the flowers have only begun to blossom. I have to wait until they make seeds and the seeds have to get ripe. Only after that I shall be able to set the snowstorms and the blizzard free to benumb the Dragon. If I release a frost now, the forests and the grass will wither."

While the Wind was speaking, the leaves were turning green, the vineyards were sprouting, the flowers were blooming, trying to outdo each other.

"At this time of the year," the Wind continued, "I ought to breeze gently so that each plant will feel neither hot nor chill."

And the Wind started to go around all estates, to carry along rains, to refresh the flowers and the grass, so that they would not be burnt by the Sun.

The Dragon became even angrier:

"You want to turn me out of your course! You want to turn me into an ice floe! The Wind hasn't helped you either! Now I'll eat you!"

And the Dragon came up closer to him.

The lad threw himself to the ground with the face downward.

"Earth, Earth, raise mountains and rocks before the Dragon, tumble him down into a precipice and reduce him to nought! As you see, he has stood in my way, wanting to eat me."

The Earth shook, whirled, raised a hillock and said:

"I keep the life of all the living beings and I have been doing it since my

appearance in the world. I can't fulfil your wish, because I have no power to turn the Dragon out of your course, and to take his soul before the time has come. I can neither prolong his days nor shorten them. I am obliged to keep the life the Dragon has. I must shield him as I shield everybody."

And the Earth lowered as it had been before that.

The Dragon grew even more furious and said:

"You want my death! The Earth cannot help you either. Now I'll eat you!"

"If the time has come for me to be eaten, you may eat me. But before my death, I ask you to fulfil my last wish. Let me go home to tell my mother about it, so that she would know. I should like to tell good-bye to her. She must neither look nor wait for me."

"Go!" said the Dragon. "Tell her what you have to, and after that I'll eat you."

The lad came home and opened the door downcast and heavyhearted.

"What's the matter, dear son? What has happened to you? Why are you so sad? Why don't you come cheerful as you must come from the wedding party?"

Sad as he was, the lad said:

"Oh mother, how can I come cheerful? A Dragon was coming towards me on the road. One of his jaws was high in the sky, while the other was on the ground. He had an emperor crown on his head and wanted to eat me. Nobody could help me: neither the Sun, nor the Wind, nor the Earth. The Dragon permitted me to let you know about my fate. Now I must go back to him as quickly as possible, otherwise he'll come and kill both of us."

The mother understood that she would remain without her son, and grieved bitterly. Her heart almost broke with such a deep sorrow.

"If the things have turned so," she said, "I'll go with you."

The mother set out to the Dragon together with her son.

When the Dragon saw that the lad was coming with his mother, he rose and said:

"How nice it is! Instead of one person, I shall eat two!"

The old mother bowed down before the Emperor and said:

"How do you do, Dragon!"

The Dragon whistled then, and fire came out of his nostrils.

"Haven't you greeted me, I would have killed you here on the spot!"

The mother was not afraid and said:

"Oh Dragon, it is not the way you think!"

"But how is it?"

"Stop a little! Why have you raised yourself in our way? You met this lad and wanted to strangle him. Let him go to his bride, where he has started for to celebrate his wedding party and to live his life on this earth. The one who goes to marry must not be stopped on his way. If anybody can help him, let him be helped. Nobody put an end to your days: neither the Sun,

nor the Wind, nor the Earth. All of them let you live. Don't block the path of this betrothed lad. Let him go further, let the Sun warm him, the Wind refresh him and the Earth shield him. If you want to eat, eat me! Eat me instead of my son! You must let him go further!"

The Dragon wondered.

"I have never seen and I have never heard of anything of the kind. Today I have found out how great mother's love is."

The Dragon stopped. He understood that there was no other love greater than mother's love for her child. He bowed before the old mother and said:

"I let you both live, and I bestow you this crown for the love you have for each other, as I have seen it today."

And the Emperor of the dragons took the gold crown from his head and gave it to the lad's mother.

The mother took the crown and went further to prepare for the wedding party. She was walking and thinking that during the wedding ceremony the bridegroom and the bride would stand under that crown, so that great love would be their lot.

The mother and son were received with joy in the village, where the fiancée lived. They celebrated such a beautiful wedding party as nobody had ever seen — with musicians, with dignity and good humour. During the wedding ceremony, mother held the gold crown over the bridegroom and bride's heads, as a sign that great love is able to defeat death.

The wedding feast had lasted for three days and three nights. The young couple lived a happy and long life after that.

From that time on a custom to hold a crown over the heads of the young couple during the wedding ceremony is preserved. The couple is blessed so that their love should be great and invincible, their lot should be full of outstanding and noble deeds.

And here is the end of the tale.

THE OLD MAN'S DAUGHTER AND THE WALNUT TREE

ong long ago, when the sun was young, and the world had only just begun, in a village there lived a widower who had a daughter, and a widow who also had a daughter. Because their lives were hard and lonely, they decided to live together. Time passed by, and their daughters grew up into fine girls, old enough to be married. The woman began to think of the wedding dowry, of dresses and linen, and that's why she went round bazaars day after day. She bought all kinds of things, but only for her own daughter. For the old man's daughter she bought nothing. She loaded her down with all kinds of housework, so that the poor girl did not know what rest meant.

As the days passed it became clear that the woman cared only for her own daughter. The man got angry and began to call her names. But the woman was a cunning one, who had the devil in her. She went to the market at once and bought some nuts for them. In order to put him in a good mood she rattled the nuts before him and showed him how fine they were. But when she shared them out she gave her daughter a whole heap of them, while her step-daughter received only one.

Her daughter ate the nuts and laughed with glee. Her stepdaughter sat sadly looking at her one nut. What should she do with it? She took it, went into the orchard and buried it in the ground. Then she sat down beside it and cried, because she had no joy in her young life.

She cried day after day, and her tears fell on the buried nut. Shortly after that the nut sprouted and a tall, beautiful walnut tree grew out of it. The girl took care of it, dug the ground around, and it grew very quickly.

One day there was a dance in the village. All the people of the village, young and old, went to the dance. The woman went there with her dressed-up daughter too, while her step-daughter was left at home and given much work to do.

"You must tidy up the house, feed the poultry, cook dinner, and when we return the table must be laid and the dishes must be ready, neither too hot, nor too cold."

The poor girl did not even know where to start, and how to get all the work done in time. She did everything she had been told, and then while the dinner was cooking she went to the walnut tree, sat down under it and began to cry, to ease her sorrow.

"Why are you crying, dear girl?" asked the walnut tree.

"How can I help crying if I have no life in my parents' house. Just look,

today everybody is out having a good time, while I am working here and sitting alone."

"Don't grieve, and don't let your heart become embittered. Enter the hole in my trunk, and take a beautiful dress and shoes you will find there, put them on and go to the dance."

The girl entered the hollow trunk of the tree, put on the dress and shoes, and when she came out she was so beautiful that everything around her shone. She picked a bunch of flowers in the garden and off she went to dance. There she gave everybody a flower except the old woman and her daughter.

Then she began to dance, and all the lads of the village tried to get at least one dance with her.

Before the last dance, the girl went home quickly straight to the walnut tree, took off her beautiful dress, put on the old one she had, and put the dinner on the table.

When the old woman and her daughter arrived, the table was laid, the food was ready — neither too hot, nor too cold. They sat down at table and began to talk:

"Today there was such a beautiful girl at the dance. She was as lovely as a fairy. She gave everybody a flower, but for us she had none left."

The news about this beautiful girl soon got around the country so that even some princes heard about her, how in such and such a village there was a very lovely girl, more beautiful than the sun when it rises, and the cherry tree when it blossoms.

The following Sunday there was again a dance in the village. Many handsome young fellows came from far and near, all of them dressed in their best.

The old woman dressed up her daughter too, hoping that maybe some young lad would fall in love with her, and then they would celebrate the wedding with a fine party. The step-daughter was left at home and given more work to do. Then the old woman mixed up a sack of poppy seeds with a sack of sand and said to her:

"Before we come back you must do everything you did last time, and in addition to that you must single out the poppy seeds from the sand."

The old man's daughter remained at home, and began to cry bitterly.

"Why are you crying, dear girl?" a dove from the roof of the house asked her.

"Why should I not cry, when my step-mother is trying to kill me. It wasn't enough for her that she gave me such a lot of work to do, but she had to mix up a sack of poppy seeds with a sack of sand for me to single out."

"Go and do your other work, and don't worry about the poppy seeds. Come a little later just to tie up the sacks."

The dove began to fly round the house, and then a flock of doves gathered

so that the yard was full of them. Before the girl had done her work they sorted out all the poppy seeds, and she had only to go and tie up the sacks.

Free of her troubles for a while, the girl went to sit under the walnut tree and glanced towards the village, where she could hear the music playing for the dances.

"Dear girl," said the walnut tree, "enter my hollow trunk, put on the dress you like best, and go to the dance and enjoy yourself."

The girl entered the hollow and chose the best dress there. When she put it on and went off to the dance she looked so beautiful that one might think that she was the moon from the sky, but not the old man's daughter.

With a big bunch of flowers in her hand she came to the dance just when it was at its height, and gave everybody a flower, except the old woman and her daughter.

The lads and the people round looked at her as though enchanted, as though happiness had filled their hearts, and they wanted to do nothing, but sing and dance.

Everybody wanted to dance with her, while the old woman's daughter stood by and nobody paid any attention to her.

Before the last dance the girl ran back home, and left many lads still longing to dance with her.

By the time the old woman and her daughter returned, she had taken off her expensive dress, and put on her ragged one. She was waiting for them with all the work done, and with the dinner ready — neither too hot, nor too cold.

Sitting at the head of the table, the old woman said, stuffing both cheeks full of food:

"The lovely girl who was there last Sunday came again. She was so beautiful that nobody, and especially none of the lads, could take their eyes off her. But she did not stay till the end of the dance to be seen off to her carriage, and nobody knows who she is and where she comes from."

The old man's daughter sat and listened but pretended to know nothing at all.

The following Sunday there was dancing again in the village. The old woman began to prepare her daughter for it on Friday already. She arranged her ribbons and bows, combed her hair and fitted her out. Meanwhile the old man's daughter had to do all the hard work. When the old woman got angry, it was the stepdaughter who suffered first of all. When they were ready to go to the dance the wicked old woman mixed up two sacks of poppy seeds with two sacks of millet, and ordered the old man's daughter:

"Before we return you must tidy up the house, cook the dinner, feed the poultry and then single out the poppy seeds from the millet."

It was more then enough work for many people, and the girl became very sad and began to cry. She simply did not know what to begin with and where to finish. She understood quite clearly that the wicked old woman wanted to get rid of her by hook or by crook.

Just then a flock of sparrows flew by, and one of them asked her:

"Why are you crying so bitterly, my busy and obedient clever girl?"

"Why should I not cry, when this step-mother of mine is doing her best to kill me. She loads me down with so much work, so that she can tear me to pieces if I don't manage to do everything."

"Don't trouble and don't get sad! Do the other work, and as for the poppy seeds and the millet we shall single them out."

The girl began to run about her business in the house and out of it, to the well and from the well, or to the hen-coop and back again. Before she finished the work the sparrows had singled out the poppy seeds from the millet, and she had only to tie up the sacks.

Thanking the sparrows for their help, she went to sit under the walnut tree for a little and glanced sadly towards the village, where the people had gathered for the dance.

"Enter my hollow trunk, dress and go the dance as well," said the walnut tree.

The girl entered the hollow trunk, took off her ragged dress, and put on one sewed with gold thread, and decorated with precious gems. Now the old man's daughter looked more beautiful than ever, so that even the sun blushed for shame, feeling itself outshone. She picked a bunch of flowers from the garden and off she went to the dance again. There she gave a flower to everybody, except the old woman and her daughter.

All the young lads, including even a prince who was present, were afire with desire to marry her.

The girl danced beautifully, and was very gay and charming and as bright as a berry. Everybody was in high spirits, the flutists didn't take their flutes from their lips, the fiddlers didn't take their bows from the strings, as soon as one dance ended, another began, and everyone was delighted with her, but when she was about to leave before the last dance the prince tried to catch her by the hand, but she pulled it away, and he was left holding only her ring.

The girl ran home quickly, took off her dance-dress, put on her ragged one, and by the time she had laid the table, the old woman and her daughter came home.

"The beautiful girl was at the dance again, and a good-looking prince was left holding the ring from her hand, when she ran off, and now he's looking for her everywhere. He said he would go from one end of the kingdom to the other, trying the ring on every girl's finger, until he finds her again."

The old woman could think of nothing else now, except to get her daughter ready and to wait for the prince. She manicured her nails, washed and combed her hair and sat her on the porch in front of the house, in hopes that he would come and try the ring on her finger too. As for the old man's daughter she set her to work, and she did everything properly and well. Instead of a reward the wicked woman seized her by the hair and pushed her behind the door of the shed, where she bumped her head on a beam, and fell into an old beehive full of ashes.

"There you must sit, you lazy-bones. Don't you dare to make a sound, and don't come out until I call you", shrieked the old woman.

The girl sat there and cried and sobbed her heart out knowing how cruel both the old woman and her daughter were.

Just at that time the prince drove up to the old woman's house.

"Good day to you, Granny!"

"Welcome, my prince!"

"Have you any girls here?"

"I have, my prince, I have."

And straight way she pushed her daughter before him, but when he tried the ring, it did not fit her finger.

"Heven't you any other girls?"

"No, we have nobody else. This is the only joy of our life."

When the prince was just about to leave, a rooster jumped up in front of him, flapped its wings and crowed:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
The step-daughter waits for you
In the old shed where they thresh,
In a beehive full of ash!"

Then the old woman seized a broom and threw it at the rooster.

"Shoo, you devilish old rooster! Haven't you got anywhere else to crow, and any other yard to scratch in?"

The rooster again jumped up in front of the prince and crowed:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
The step-daughter waits for you
In the old shed where they thresh,
In a beehive full of ash!"

The old woman rushed at it with a stick.

"Shoo, you cursed old rooster! You'd be better dead, than annoying decent people."

The prince turned round, looked behind the door of the shed, found the old beehive, and took the girl out.

"Stretch out your hand to see if this ring fits your finger."

When the prince placed it on her finger it fitted perfectly.

"Well, Granny, would you give your consent for this girl to marry to me?"

"Oh, no, dear prince! She's a lazy slut, not fit to be married. Why make a laughing stock of yourself with her? Here, marry this one. She is so diligent, and beautiful."

"No, Granny, I want to marry this girl. If you give us your blessing, so much the better, if not, then fare you well, for we are leaving."

Just then the old man opened the gate. He had just returned from his business as a carter. Findind out what was afoot, he quietened the old woman down, and gave his consent to the prince's marriage to his daughter.

Well, as everything was agreed, they brought in the musicians and began a wedding party according to the old customs. At first the old woman and her daughter made no trouble, but when they saw the old man's daughter in her beautiful dress, and understood that she was the girl who had been at the dance, they almost burst with anger. They began to think of how to get rid of the old man's daughter, for playing such a trick on them.

Everybody present enjoyed themselves eating, drinking and dancing, and only the old woman and her daughter were ill-at-ease and downcast.

After the wedding party the prince and his young wife said farewell to everybody, and went off to live in their palace. From the very first day their life was harmonious and happy, for they loved each other dearly. Later on they had a strong handsomc son, to the joy of their friends and the envy of their enemies.

And everything would have been even better, if only a war hadn't broken out, and the prince didn't have to go off to fight.

The old woman and her daughter were as full of venom as two scorpions, and were only waiting for a suitable moment to kill the old man's daughter. They wanted nothing better than to see her alone. They put on some ragged dresses, each took a stick in her hand, and they started off for the prince's palace. When they came to the palace gates, the old woman knocked, and as soon as they were opened, she began to cry and to wail:

"We are two poor beggar-women. Take pity on us and help us, and we shall be of great use to you in your kitchen.""

The old man's daughter decided to take them in, as she was alone.

"All right! Come in! You can live and work here, since I have been left alone," said the young wife, having no idea who the two were.

In such a way the old woman and her daughter settled down in the young wife's house.

Well, as people say, you don't have to teach a snake how to coil up and how to bite, since it knows it too well itself. The old woman knew very well how to get rid of the young wife. The next day at noon, when the sun was shining warmly, the old woman's daughter came and said to the young wife:

"Let's go to the river to bathe, and to cool ourselves a little. What a stifling heat it is outside, and it's even worse indoors!"

"Oh, that's a very good idea, let's go," said the young wife, and they started off with the baby, for she could not imagine what harm might come from such a deceitful cruel-hearted person's words, and belived them to be well-intended.

At the river they bathed, splashed themselves with water, and sat on the meadow full of flowers. There was a small foot-bridge across the river, and the old woman's daughter suggested that they should take a walk along it. The young wife agreed, as she had been there only once before.

Nursing the baby, she came to the middle of the bridge, along with the old woman's daughter.

"Oh, how lovely you look with the baby in your arms! Take a look in the water and see for yourself. Shall I some day be as beautiful as you are now? Let me hold the baby for a moment, to see how I'll look."

Well, why not let her have her wish?

Babies are usually the great joy and pride of their mothers. She gave her the baby, but the old woman's daughter took him with one hand, while with the other one she gave the young wife a push, so that she fell into the water head-first. Then the old woman's daughter turned round and as happy as if she had done a good deed, started back for the palace.

The old woman jumped like an old goat with joy, and soon both of them changed their dresses. The girl put on the young wife's most beautiful dress, left the baby in a room, and began to wait for the prince to return and to begin a new happy life.

The prince's wife sank into the water, and only bubbles were seen above it. When she reached the bottom of the river she turned into a barbel, and began to swim with the other fishes. Wishing to see the sun again, she jumped up above the water, and instantly turned into a bird. But though she was a bird, she still had a mother's soul. Longing to see her baby, she flew up in the sky straight to the palace. There she heard the baby crying, sat on a branch near the window and began to sing a mournful song:

"Lullaby-lullay!
Mother sings today.
You've no rest
On another's breast.
You'll meet harm
On another's arm.
Lullaby-lullay!"

While the bird was singing the baby stopped crying. Otherwise he cried all the time. Though he was a little one, he wanted to be fed and to be bathed. The old woman and her daughter did not even look at him. They were sitting at the window, watching and waiting for the prince to come.

The drowned wife could not find peace anywhere. She flew from tree to tree singing:

"Lullaby-lullay!
Mother sings today.
You've no rest
On another's breast.
You'll meet harm
On another's arm.
Lullaby-lullay!"

The old woman and her daughter heard the bird's song and were terror-stricken.

"May the Lord have mercy on us! It may be the baby's mother, and if so our days are numbered!"

They began to think what to do and how they could catch the bird. While they were brooding over their evil plans, the prince returned from the war, and when he saw the old woman's daughter he said:

"Ah, my dear wife, how you have changed! You've got much darker, and much thinner."

"How could I help become darker and thinner, when I have been watching and waiting for you so long!"

"But why is our baby crying all the time?"

"I don't know what's the matter with him, but he neither sucks nor sleeps. I don't even know what to do to quieten him."

And only then she took the baby in her arms and began to dandle him. Just then the bird sat on a branch near the window and started its song:

"Lullaby-lullay!
Mother sings today.
You've no rest
On another's breast.
You'll meet harm
On another's arm.
Lullaby-lullay!"

The prince may have heard the song or not, but he was glad that the baby became quiet. Then the old woman's daughter said to him:

"Dear husband, go out quickly and shoot that bird on the top of the tree, and I'll make some soup for us."

The prince took his bow and arrows at once and began to aim at the bird. The bird jumped up and flew away. Seeing that it was so difficult to escape the arrows, she decided to fly to the walnut tree in the orchard, and to hide there. But the prince followed her closely. He was aiming his arrow first here, then there, until the bird reached the walnut tree in the orchard at home. And oh, what a wonder! As soon as she sat on a branch of the walnut tree, she turned back into a woman as she had been earlier.

The prince was so amazed that he dropped both the bow and the arrows.

He rushed forward and took her in his arms, and kissed her, while she began to tell him what she had suffered in his absence.

When he heard about it he hurried home. He was in such a rage that he was ready to tear the two women to pieces. After a while they came home, and when the evil old woman and her daughter saw them coming they began to tremble, their knees began to knock, and their teeth began to chatter.

The prince seized the old woman's daughter and tied her to the tail of a nine-year-old unbroken mare. Then he gave the mare three lashes of the whip and set her free. Off she went away over hills, ravines and ditches and soon the old woman's daughter was torn to pieces, and nothing remained of her. As for the evil old woman, he seized her by hair and dragged her to the border of his kingdom. Then he said to her:

"May you be cursed, you old witch, may you perish from the face of the land, and find rest neither on the earth, nor under the earth."

While he cursed her, the earth opened and swallowed her up, only her head remained sticking out.

Whover passed by threw stones at her, or took a round-about way so as not to see her.

And that is the end of the tale.

It may be true, it may be lies,
I haven't seen it with my eyes.

DAFIN AND VESTRA

Far, far away, in that part of the earth where the sun goes to sleep, when it is tired of looking on the worries of the world, there once spread a great kingdom. There lived a King and a Queen. They were neither of them young any longer, but they had no children to help them when they became very old. All this worried them more than their advancing years. It so happened that they heard of an old hermit who knew how to make all kinds of medicines from herbs. He came to the King's palace to comfort them in their sorrow.

He was lead to the high throne, sank on his knees, and gave the Queen a cluster of grapes from a vine which grew on the hillside in the bright sunlight before his eyes.

As soon as she tasted the grapes, she knew that she was going to have a child.

A new sun warmed the King's heart. He became cheerful and began to take interest in life again.One day he took some of his men and went hunting. They killed many wolves, foxes and hares, and in the heat of the hunt, they left the borders of his kingdom far behind them and didn't notice it. Descending to the bottom of a steep ravine, they found themselves in a high fortress, stone walls all round about, and not a living soul to be seen. The huntsmen tried like birds in a net to find a way out, but with no success. They remained there for a whole day and then another. They ate all the game they caught, and soon began to feel the pangs of hunger. On the third day they saw the Devil walking on the wall of the fortress, puffing away at his pipe.

"Blackest of Knaves, tell us what have we done, that you have imprisoned us in this fortress?"

"I didn't imprison you here, you came here on your own accord," answered the Devil from above.

"What must I give you if you open the gates of the fortress?" the King asked him.

"Give me what you haven't seen and haven't heard of in your palace, and I'll let you go at once," replied the Devil.

The King began to think; he knew that the cunning Devil was up to some trick, but he did not understand quite well what, and because he was very anxious to get out of the fortress and return home to his wife, he said:

"Very well, I give it to you."

"Make me a deed confirming the present, and sign it," the Devil demanded.

As soon as the Devil received the deed, the fortress walls disappeared, beneath the earth. Happily they all went home, and when the King came to his palace all the joy and happiness of the world were his. The Queen had given birth to a fine healthy boy, who grew not day by day, but hour by hour, and amazed everybody. They named him Dafin. Soon he was big enough to help the King. Then quite unexpectedly the Devil came to the palace and demanded nothing else but the King's son Dafin. The King and the Queen both stood horror-struck, and before they had time to refuse, the Devil snatched the boy by the collar, turned round and made off.

Dafin didn't see which road they took, not where they were going, but soon found himself in a strange country. The Devil set him to work straight away. Poor Dafin suffered from hunger and cold, sleepless nights, and endless torments. But he had to be patient, for he dared not disobey the Devil.

Dafin was an inquisitive boy, and wanted to know many things, but most of all he liked to learn various languages, even those of the birds, animals and insects.

Once the Devil left for a distant country, and Dafin, being left alone,

went to a spring. There he sat down in the cool shadow of a poplar tree,ate, drank and lay down to rest. Then three birds alighted on the top of the tree. Seeing the young lad, one of them told the others:

"Look, sisters, a kind young fellow from a distant land is resting here. He was brought here by the Devil. If he knew of Harap's sufferings, he would go and save the poor old man from the Devil's punishment. For one hundred and eighty years on end he has been taking water from the inexhaustible well and pouring it in a valley, where the beautiful Vestra goes bathing. She was stolen away and bewitched by the Devil to be an instrument of his evil-doing."

Having heard all this, Dafin set out and walked and walked along many valleys, without pause or rest, and at dawn of the fourth day he came to a large lake, so large that one could not see the further bank.

In the distance on the slope of a hill he saw a well, and an old man who was lifting and lowering the long sweep-arm of the well, with a huge bucket on the end.

Dafin came up to him and said:

"May God help you, grandad!"

"Thank you, my lad! But who are you?"

"I am a stranger here, grandad. I was carried off by the Devil, and now I don't know how to get out of his kingdom and to enjoy a free life."

The old man sat down on the well brim and began to think.

"Well," he said at last, "you'll escape from this place only with the help of Vestra — a young girl brought by the Devil from over seven lands and seven seas to be the tool of his evil-doing. Now she has acquired the power and the knowledge of the Devil, but her heart is still pure.

"Go to the other side of the lake and hide yourself, and when she comes to bathe, take her clothes and run, but God help you not to look back, because if you do, you' l lose all your power over her. Come to me for my blessing, and if you get free from the Devil, may you live a happy life."

Dafin went to the further bank of the lake, where Vestra usually came to bathe. He laid down in the grass so as not to be seen.

The morning star is beautiful when it rises in the blue sky, but Vestra was much more beautiful when she came down to the bank of the lake. There she undressed, and as soon as she touched the water, she became a swan, as white as snow, and began to swim, to beat the water with her wings, and to dip her head beneath the lake. But Dafin did not wait to watch all these wonders he just stole the girl's clothes and ran.

When Vestra came to the bank her clothes were missing. Her heart beat with fright. She looked around and suddenly saw Dafin and started after him, and in order to stop him, she began to sing a beautiful song, but Dafin went on and didn't stop. Vestra sang yet more bewitchingly, with all the power of a loving heart:

"Dafin, darling mine,
Honey sweet and fine,
My one chosen flower
In this festive hour,
Do not run away,
Stay, my love, I pray,
Look back once at me,
Happy we shall be!"

Dafin sighed, Dafin moaned, Dafin longed to look back at her, but he resisted the temptation. He ran straight on to Harap's well, dropped the clothes, and by the time the old man put down the bucket, and laid his hand on Dafin's shoulder, Vestra already stood dressed beside him. The old man blessed them, and then he took out two rings and placed them on their fingers. The young couple rose from their knees and thanked him. Then Dafin remembered the bird's words and said:

"Now, grandad, you have earned your pardon, and are free of the Devil's sentence."

As soon as he said that the old man Harap disappeared. In a moment the well, the bucket, and the old man simply vanished, and only grass was left growing on that place. That meant that they should long ago have left the face of the earth.

Dafin claimed Vestra as his bride, but she began to weep and said:

"We cannot leave the Devil's kingdom without his consent. Go to him and ask him for my hand in marriage."

Dafin went towards the Devil's palace, and many cliffs he climbed, and many ravines he crossed before he saw the castle, as black as soot.

He entered the Devil's palace, bowed and said:

"Greetings, Devil!"

"Greetings," answered the Evil One. "What ill wind has brought you to my palace?"

"I have come to ask you to give me Vestra's hand in marriage."

"I'll give you my consent if you fulfil three orders."

"I shall try, Son of Darkness."

"Very well! Come to me in the evening!"

That evening Dafin went to the castle. The Devil came out, went in the middle of the yard and pointed to the west and asked:

"What do you see?"

"The edge of the earth," answered Dafin.

"If you want to have Vestra as your bride, by tomorrow morning all that land must be ploughed, the seed must be sown, the wheat must be grown, the ears must be mown, and the flour all ground down. At sunrise you must bring me a warm loaf of bread to eat."

Full of sorrow and doubt, Dafin went back to Vestra that night

and told her that they were lost, that nobody could perform such a task.

"Don't worry and don't be sad. It is very easy to carry out."

Then Vestra looked over the hills and whistled once, and a host of devils seen and unseen gathered there, the whole place was teeming with them.

"By morrow morning you must carry out my order," said the girl. "From the Devil's palace up to the western horizon all the land must be ploughed, the seed must be sown, the wheat must be grown, the ears must be mown, and the flour all ground down. Tomorrow at sunrise you must bring me a warm loaf of bread. Do you all understand?"

"Yes! Yes!" shouted the devils from all sides. All of them at once set to work, and didn't waste one moment.

Some of them ploughed, others sowed, some of them crawled underground and breathed warmth on the roots of the wheat so that it would grow more quickly. By early dawn the wheat was ripe, they mowed it, milled it and put the loaves of bread into the oven. By sunrise the bread was baked and waiting. Dafin put a huge round loaf on a napkin and took it to the Devil, still warm.

"Here you are, Son of Darkness, I have carried out your order."

The Devil frowned, but took the loaf of bread.

Then he led Dafin to a room full of weapons and said:

"Choose any weapon you like, because the next task is hunting. Tomorrow you must come to hunt a hare in my garden. You'll have to hunt only in my courtyard. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, Son of Darkness," answered Dafin, and went back to Vestra laughing.

"Why are you laughing?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I laugh, if the Devil has fooled himself. He simply ordered me to hunt a hare which will be in his palace yard."

"Don't dare to laugh at the Devil, Dafin, or you will have to weep afterwards. It will not be a simple hare, but the Devil himself! Listen! Don't go hunting it with your gun, because you'll never catch it. Sit at the palace door and wait. I'll turn myself into a hound and chase the hare. I'll drive it out of every hiding-place. Finding no place to hide, it will try to enter the palace. At that moment you must catch it and strike its head on the palace steps with all your might."

The next afternoon Dafin sat hidden behind the palace door. The dog began to chase the hare seeming at any moment about to catch it. Finding no way out, the hare ran towards the palace, but when it tried to enter, Dafin jumped up, grabbed it by its legs and struck its head with all might on the stone steps. The hare shrieked violently, then lay still.

The noise and the shriek made the Devil's wife come out to see what was happening. When she saw the scene, first she wanted to scream, but then she thought better of it and asked angrily:

"Stop it, Dafin, why are you raising this racket?"

"The Son of Darkness ordered me to catch a hare to be roasted."

"Wait, don't kill it, give it to me, I'll skin it and roast it myself."

"Oh, no! I must give it into the Devil's own hands!"

"But that is impossible. He has gone out and will not return till late in the evening. Give me the hare, and by that time I'll roast it for supper and you'll come and sup with us."

So Dafin gave her the hare, and went off with a clear conscience, glad that he had got rid of one more trouble.

In the evening he went to the palace to taste the hare. The Devil received him, as if nothing had happened, gave him plenty to eat and drink, and pretended to be very glad. But his head was bound up with a towel, round his eyes were bluish-black bruises, and he could hardly open his mouth when he told Dafin that Vestra would be his, if he could come the next day and pick her out among his other girls.

"Very well!" said Dafin, and went out full of joy that he could now easily fulfil the Devil's orders.

"Why are you looking so glad?" asked Vestra, on meeting him.

"Why shouldn't I be glad? He simply told me to pick you out from among the other girls, and go on my way."

"Oh, Dafin, my darling! This is a very difficult task to carry out! You ought to be weeping, not laughing! Tomorrow he'll make you choose me out of hundreds of girls looking all the same, like peas in a pod, the same face, the same hair, the same clothes. How will you recognize me?"

"They may be all alike, as blades of grass, or like the stars, but I would recognize you."

"Don't boast like that. You'd better listen to what I tell you. Tomorrow when you look in turn into the eyes of all those girls, choose the girl with tears in them."

And so they agreed. Next day, when Dafin went to pick out Vestra, the Devil took him among a crowd of girls all looking just like her. Dafin looked and looked, but he couldn't recognize her anywhere.

Nobody could have found her there among all those girls, as much alike as ears in a wheat-field. Dafin's heart began to beat with anxiety. Suddenly he saw tears in the eyes of one of the girls.

"This is Vestra, Son of Darkness!" the brave lad shouted happily.

The Devil went purple with rage. He understood their agreement, and put them in a deep dungeon under the ground, locked with twelve iron doors, all barred and bolted. There was one tiny window, high

up, through which a ray of light as slender as a thread came. Dafin became very miserable and full of despair, but Vestra struck her ring on the ground and they both turned into small flies and flew out of the dungeon through the tiny window. When they found themselves free and touched the earth again, they once more became human, ran and ran up-hill and down-dale as fast as they could. Soon the Devil found out that they had escaped, and looked around over land and sea, and when he saw them far off he sent his swiftest horsemen to bring them back.

Vestra looked back, recognized the riders and said:

„They are cátching up with us."

"What shall we do?" asked Dafin.

"Don't worry. I'll turn into a large orchard, and you'll become an old gardener. When they come here and ask if you have seen two young people running by, you must tell them that they passed by long ago. Then you must add that it was when you were planting the orchard."

As Vestra said this, she turned into a large orchard with various kinds of trees in it, and Dafin became an old, old gardener.

The Devil's horsemen galloped up and asked the gardener:

"Have you not seen two young people running by?"

Yes, I saw them, but it was very long ago. I was just planting this orchard, and since that time nobody has passed this way."

When the riders heard this they turned back.

"Son of Darkness," they said to the Devil, "we have been where you sent us, but we met nobody except an old gardener in an orchard."

"Well, these were they! Go and catch them and bring them here!"

The Devil's horsemen started off again, to hunt them down.

Vestra looked back and recognized the riders once more.

"They are catching up with us again. Answer them in the same way, but this time we'll be a wheat-field and an old man ready to begin mowing."

"Very well," said Dafin, and found himself an old man with a scythe in his hand, near a big wheat-field.

As he took a handful of wheat-ears to check if the grain was hard enough, the riders galloped up and asked:

"Tell us, old man, have you seen two young people running this way?"

"Yes, I saw them when I was sowing this wheat. Since then nobody had passed this way."

The horsemen hearing this, turned back again.

"Son of Darkness," they said bowing at the Devil's feet, "it is impossible to catch up with them. We came across an old man who

was mowing his wheat-field, and he told us that he had seen the two young people, but it was when he was sowing the wheat. We turned back, because we don't know where they went."

The Devil replied with a curse of anger:

"They were there."

Like a storm-cloud the Devil rose and ran after them. Vestra saw the dark cloud behind and recognized him coming. She struck her ring on the ground and turned Dafin into a deep wide river with swift-running waters, and herself she turned into a duck, swimming on its waves.

The Devil reached the river, looked at the duck and recognized Vestra at once. He began to breathe in so deeply that it caused a hurricane that blew far over the river, and brought the duck directly towards his mouth. But the river raised its waves and drove the duck away towards the opposite bank.

Seeing that he couldn't get Vestra in his clutches in that way, the Devil began to drink the water, and drank and drank till he burst...

As travellers lost in a dense forest suddenly see a footpath, so they at once saw the way clearly. Happily they set out in their own shapes again, and walked and walked, past seven seas, and seven lands and at last they arrived in Dafin's kingdom.

There the old King and Queen were still grieving and bemoaning their unhappy fate. Since the time the Devil stole their only son away their tears had never been dry, and a smile had never lit their faces. But now they were overjoyed to see him alive and well, before their very eyes. They arranged a wonderful wedding party for Dafin and his beautiful bride Vestra, and crowds of people were invited. After that Dafin began to reign in his old father's place, and Vestra took the place of the old Queen, and maybe they are still reigning till now, if they are not dead yet.

THE SHEPHERD'S CLEVER DAUGHTER

nce there was a shepherd. From childhood he lived and served as a hired labourer in many villages, then when he was getting old he came to serve the King, taking care of his flocks. One fine day the King ordered the shepherd to take the sheep to market, to sell them and to bring back both the money and all the sheep. The shepherd had never before been given such orders and he was sad and worried, not knowing how to carry out that unusual task. How can one bring back what is sold, and still keep the money?

He returned home ill at ease. There his daughter met him. She was a girl of about seventeen, and when she saw him so sad she asked:

"What's happened to you, father? Why are you so sad?"

"How can I help being sad, my dear!" he said, and went on to tell her about the King's order.

"That's nothing to worry about, father. Go to bed and rest. The morning is wiser than the evening!"

"What do you think we shall do, my dear?"

"Tomorrow morning go to the market, shear the sheep, sell the wool, and return with the money and the sheep, as the King has ordered."

His daughter's advice cheered him up, and he went to bed and slept well. In the morning he took the sheep to the market, sheared them, sold the wool and returned with the money and the sheep.

The King ordered the money to be put in the treasury, and presented the shepherd with a baby calf.

When it grew up a little, the shepherd took it out to the pasture, on a near-by meadow. One day it so happened that it strayed onto a noble lord's land, and he sent one of his servants to take the calf into his herd.

The shepherd came up to the lord, and said:

"Give me back my calf, please."

"No, my dear fellow, I won't. It's mine now. It wandered onto my lands, and grazed my grass."

"Let's go to the King and ask him to judge the matter."

So they went to the King and the shepherd said:

"Your Highness, the rich landlord has taken the calf you gave me."

Then the King listened to the landlord's story. He didn't know how to decide the matter. He thought and thought, and racked his brains, and then told them:

"Go home and come back tomorrow morning. I shall give the calf to the

one who can answer the following questions correctly: what is the fattest thing in the world; what is the quickest thing in the world; what is the sweetest thing in the world, and what is the softest thing in the world?"

They both returned home. The poor shepherd was sad, but the rich landlord was quite happy. The landlord's wife asked her husband:

"What did the King decide?"

"I have to tell him tomorrow morning what is the fattest thing on earth, what is the quickest, what is the sweetest and what is the softest, and if I answer correctly, I shall get the calf."

She answered him without any hesitation:

"What could be fatter than our pig, and what could run quicker than our grey-hound, which can catch a runing hare."

"That's absolutely right, my dear! And what is the sweetest and the softest thing on earth?"

"In our bee-garden there is a big beehive, its honey is the sweetest in the world, and our feather pillows are the softest in the world. You lay your head on them, and it just sinks in."

The landlord felt very happy, and was quite sure that he would win the case.

The poor shepherd returned home sad and sighing. His daughter asked:

"Father, what's happened to you, why are you so sad?"

He told her about the King's four questions, which he didn't know how to answer.

"Go to bed and don't worry. When he asks you what is the fattest thing in the world, tell him that it is the earth itself."

"Very well! But when he asks me what is the quickest?"

"Tell him that nothing is quicker than thought and sight."

"And what is the sweetest?"

"The sweetest thing is sleep, and a pillow is the softest, but you have to put your hand under yout head to sleep well and have pleasant dreams."

The shepherd calmed down a little, but he was still somewhat scared. When they came to the palace next morning, the King questioned the rich landlord first.

"Take a seat, my noble lord."

The landlord sat down, and the King asked:

"Well, what is the fattest thing in the world?"

"Your Majestry, I have got a three-year-old pig of more than twenty poods, with fat on it as thick as my hand. I don't know anything fatter than that!"

"And what would you say?" he asked the shepherd.

"I'd say that there is nothing fatter than the earth, which feeds and keeps us all," said the shepherd.

"That's right," said the King. "Well, tell me, landlord, what is the quickest thing in the world?"

"Your Majesty, I have a grey-hound, which can catch a running hare. I think there is nothing in the world that can run quicker than that."

"There is, landlord," said the King.

Then he asked the shepherd the same quiestion, and he answered:

"Your Highness, as a poor simple man, I should say that thought runs quicker. For instance I am here, but my thoughts fly home to my children, who need something to eat."

"That's the right answer," replied the King. "Now tell me, landlord, what are the sweetest and the softest things in the world?"

"I have a beehive full of honey in my bee garden. I believe that honey is the sweetest thing in the world; and I know nothing else as soft as my feather pillows."

"Sit down."

Now it was the shepherd's turn to answer.

"Your Highness, sleep is the sweetest thing in the world. A pillow is soft, of course, but you sleep softer and dream more sweetly when you put your hand under your head."

"You are right again. Landlord go home, the calf belongs to the shepherd."

The landlord left, but the King stopped the shepherd and asked him:

"Who taught you all these answers?"

The shepherd, being honest and just, spoke the truth:

"I have a daughter and she taught me what to say."

„How old is the girl?"

"Seventeen."

The King thought he would put her to a test.

He took a bundle of hemp and said:

"Give this bundle to your daughter and tell her to weave enough uniforms for my entire army, if not, she will have her head chopped off."

The shepherd went home, weeping.

"What's happened, father?"

"We've fallen out of the frying-pan, and into the fire! I have brought you this bundle of hemp, and you must weave uniforms for all the King's army from it. If not, the King will have your head chopped off."

"I'll do it, father, don't worry. Go to bed and rest."

When he got up in the morning, the girl gave him a chip of wood.

"Give this chip of wood to the King, and ask him to make me a

weaving loom, some reels, a shuttle, a spool, and other necessary tools for weaving, because I haven't got anything to weave uniforms for the whole army on."

The shepherd went to the palace.

"Good morning, your Majesty!"

"Good morning to you, shepherd! What is it?"

"I've brought you this chip of wood. My daughter asks you to make her a weaving loom, some reels, a shuttle, a spool, a winder, a weaver's reed and all other necessary tools for weaving from it."

Saying this, he gave the King a chip of wood the size of a finger-nail.

Then the King decided to put her to another test. He called for ten boiled eggs, and gave them to the shepherd.

"Take these eggs and tell your daughter to put them under a broody hen, to raise chicks."

"I'll tell her, your Majesty!"

"If she does not raise chicks from them, she will have her head chopped off."

The shepherd could hardly walk home, he felt so miserable.

"If I had known what would happen, I'd have given up the calf and everything else," and he told that she must raise chicks from the boiled eggs, or have her head chopped off.

The girl laughed, took the boiled eggs and gave them to her brother and sister.

"Eat them, they are a present from the King."

Then she took two handfuls of maize-seeds, and boiled them for the whole night. In the morning, she put them in a bag and said:

"Here, father, take these seeds to the King and ask him to sow them and to raise maize to feed the chicks. If he tells you that they are boiled, don't be afraid to answer that the eggs he gave you were also boiled."

The shepherd took the maize-seeds to the King.

"Your Highness, I have brought you some seeds. My daughter asks you to sow them to grow maize to feed the chicks."

The King looked at the seeds in surprise:

"But these seeds are boiled, and you won't get maize from them!"

"Well, my daughter said, and how would one get chicks from boiled eggs?"

The King saw by this time that she was very clever.

He sent the shepherd off to mind his sheep, and ordered his chancellor to go and find out secretly what kind of daughter the shepherd had, that she so successfully got out of trouble.

The chancellor put on simple clothes, and came as a traveller and knocked at the door of the shepherd's house. Nobody answered. What

was he to do? He opened the door and entered. He found the girl on the brick stove, warming herself.

"I'm sorry, sir, our house has no ears."

"Are you alone at home? Have you no father, no mother, no sister, no brother?"

"I have a brother."

"Where is he?"

"He went to change the name of some grain."

"Will he be back soon?"

"If he goes the shortest way, he'll come later, if he goes on a roundabout way he'll come sooner."

The chancellor simply couldn't make head or tail of it.

"Well, what about your mother, where is she?"

"She went to some neighbours to make a young bride out of two old women."

He couldn't understand a thing, and being a lord, he was too proud to ask the meaning. So he thought and thought, and thought, but nothing came of it.

Ashamed as he was, he had to ask the girl, as there was no other way out. He had to give the King an answer.

"My dear girl, do you know the meaning of the words you have spoken yourself?"

"Well, of course I do! If there is no dog in the house, the house has no ears, because anybody can open the door and enter," answered the girl.

"Well! And now what about your brother changing the name of the grain? And why would he come later if he uses the shortest way, and quicker if he uses the longer one?"

"He went to the mill to grind some corn. After the corn is ground, it won't be called corn any more, it will be changed into flour. On his way home he'll come straight to the tavern. If he stops there he'll come home late. If he takes another way and avoids the tavern, he'll come home quicker."

"Oh, so that's it! But I don't think that your mother is a witch who can make a young bride out of two old women?"

"Oh, that's an old country saying. It means, that she is making a new dress from two old ones."

"Now everything is clear to me. It's very witty, say what you like! Farewell, young lady!"

"Good-day, my lord!"

The chancellor returned to the King and told him that she was both beautiful and clever, and spoke only in allegories.

The King was greatly impressed by what he had heard, and his heart

beat a little faster. He called the shepherd and ordered him to tell his daughter to come to the palace not mounted, and not on foot, not on the road, but not off it, not dressed, not undressed, and not with a present, but not without one. If she comes as I have told her, I'll make her my Queen, if not, she will have her head chopped off."

The old man came home weeping. His daughter listened to the King's order and said:

"Father, bring me a fishing-net and an alive hare, and don't worry. All will be well in the end."

Her father brought what she had asked for, and she wrapped herself in the fishing-net and mounted a broom-stick, took the hare and two pigeons and set off for the King's palace with one foot on the road and one on the grass verge.

At the palace gates the dogs rushed up to bite her, but she let the hare go, and the dogs chased after it. She went into the palace, and stood before the King's throne.

"Good-day to you, your Majesty!"

"Welcome, beautiful maiden!"

"Don't disdain my humble present."

The girl stretched out her hands to present the pigeons, but just as the King went to take them, she let them fly away. So she fulfilled all the King's demands and came neither with a present nor without one, neither dressed nor undressed, neither mounted nor dismounted, because she rode on a broom-stick, and neither on the road nor off it.

Seeing the girl's cleverness and capability the King said:

"I take you to be my Queen, and to rule by my side."

"Very well, your Majesty, but let's agree from the very beginning, that in case you fail to do anyone justice, I shall do so."

"Well-spoken! It's agreed, only I'll always be the first to judge."

So the King gave a royal wedding party, and they lived very happily indeed.

A month or two, a year or more passed by. At that time there were three peasants in a village. One of them had a set of harness, another had a cart, while the third had a mare. They all wanted to go to the mill, so they decided to put the harness on the mare, the mare in the shafts, and all to get in the cart together, and so they all reached the mill. On their way back they stopped to have a rest, fell asleep, and when they woke up they saw a new-born foal. The owner of the cart said:

"Thank God! The foal obviously belongs to my cart, and when it grows a little, I'll have my own horse and cart."

The owner of the harness did not agree:

"Oh, you cunning devil! The foal quite clearly belongs to my harness. From now on I'll have my own foal!"

But the owner of the mare told them:

"But, my good fellows, the foal belongs to my mare. She has just given birth to it!"

"No! No! It's for my cart..."

"No! No! It's for my harness..."

Every one of them claimed the foal as his. They agreed not to quarrel, but to go to the King's court.

The three of them came to the King's court, and asked for justice to be done. It so happened that the King was not at home. The owner of the mare asked the Queen to judge the matter.

"Your Highness, it happened so and so... Be so kind and judge the case for us, for my foal will die, if it's taken from its mother."

The Queen, seeing the urgency of the matter, decided to grant them justice. She ordered the foal to be locked in a stable.

"Now you take your mare and stay there."

The owner of the mare stood where he had been told.

"And you take your cart and stay there, on the other side."

He also did as he had been told.

"And you take your harness and stay at the same distance away."

The owner of the harness went where he had been told.

"Now open the stable and let the foal get out. The one to whom it goes will be the owner of the foal."

Meanwhile the mare was neighing, because its foal was locked up. When they freed the foal, it ran straight to the mare.

"Do you see to whom the foal belongs?"

"We do, your Gracious Highness."

They left the palace, and on their way home, they met the King returning.

"Where are you coming from, my good fellows?"

"We have been to court."

"What case did you bring there?"

"Your Majesty, it happened so and so..."

"I don't know what to tell you. I think the foal should belong to the one who first saw it."

"The Queen judged differently."

When the King heard that he hurried back to the palace in great anger and called the Queen.

"Did I not tell you that I must be the first judge here!"

"You did."

"Then how dare you disobey me? Now leave the palace! Quickly!"

"I'll leave the palace this very evening said the Queen, "but before I do, let's prepare the table and eat and drink to celebrate my departure."

"So be it! Then you can go wherever you wish. You can take what you love best of all in the palace, but then you must go away. I don't

wish to see you any more!"

"I shall obey, your Majesty!"

So they sat at the table and celebrated her departure. The Queen drank only water, and the King drank only wine. They drank until midnight, by which time the King could no longer stand on his feet.

Then the Queen ordered the servants to get the carriage ready. When the four horses had been harnessed, she took the King, who was now fast asleep, and sat him on the carriage seat beside her, then told the coachman:

"Whip up the horses, coachman, and let us start."

"Where to, your Highness?"

"Go straight ahead till I tell you to stop."

The coachman did as the Queen commanded. He dared not disobey.

So they travelled and travelled, until the King woke up, and in great surprise asked:

"Where are we going?"

"To my house, your Majesty."

"But what did I tell you?"

"Well, what did you tell me?"

"I told you to take what you love most of all and leave the palace."

"That's exactly what I've done!"

"That's what you've done? How's that? Explain it!"

"There is nothing else in the world that I could love more than you, that's why I took you and left."

The King sighed, stopped the carriage, and said:

"You have come out on top again. Let's return to the palace, my dear, and from now on you can do justice just as you like."

They returned to the palace and lived together happily. All the trials that followed she conducted with fairness, nobody was done an injustice, and everybody spoke about the shepherd's clever daughter, who brought justice to the King's court, and news of the shepherd's daughter, who became the highest judge in the land spread all round the world.

Well, I've mounted my horse, dear friend,
And have told you this tale to the end.

PACALA AS A FARM-HAND

t happened long, long ago and if it hadn't happened it wouldn't have been told about. Long ago there lived three brothers who remained orphans. And what could they do when they were in straitened circumstances? They set out to serve people.

At first the eldest brother went to the priest and asked:

"Father, do you need a farm-hand?"

"Oh, I do! I just need one."

"Will you employ me by a month or by a year?"

"As you like it, only don't get infuriated or angry, as I have such a habit: if anybody gets angry or infuriated I cut off his nose and an ear."

"All right, father," said the eldest brother and began to work.

He worked a day, worked another, but the priest didn't even think of providing him with food.

"Father, it would be proper to give me to eat."

"Oh, poor me, both my wife and I have forgotten to feed you. But you haven't got angry, have you?"

"Well, father, who wouldn't if you leave him hungry and thirsty?"

The priest cut off the nose and an ear of the farm-hand.

Shortly after that, the second brother came to serve the priest. The agreement was the same as with the eldest: if anybody got angry his nose and an ear had to be cut off.

Settled!

The second brother began to work and toiled with great diligence. He was quick at work, but the priest didn't even think of giving him any food. Some three days later the farm-hand dared to ask:

"Father, I die of hunger, won't you give me anything to eat?"

"I haven't got any food. But maybe you are angry?"

"Everybody would get angry in my place, if you make him work hungry and thirsty day after day."

The priest did not hesitate to cut off his nose and an ear as well. In short, both farm-hands got into a scrape. There is a saying that if one picks a quarrel with a priest, he's sure to get into a scrape.

Seeing his brothers in such a misfortune Pacala, the youngest brother, said:

"Well, brothers, now I shall go to serve the priest."

"Give up the thought! We couldn't get out of the tight corner with him, and the same may happen to you."

"No, I will go!" said the youngest brother and went straight to the priest.

"Father dear, don't you need a farm-hand?"

"You have come just in time, my son. I'm in great need of one. Let's shake hands, only you must know that I have my faults: I like joyful people, but not sullen farm-hands, who get easily angered. Let's come to an agreement from the very beginning: the one who will get angry the first, will have his nose and an ear cut off."

"All right, father! How long will our agreement be in effect?"

"You'll serve me till the cuckoo sings."

When they agreed, the priest sent Pacala with the plough and six oxen to till the field, but he gave him nothing to eat.

But Pacala did not trouble his head about it. He sang, drew the first furrow and worked till noon. When it was time to have lunch, he took two oxen, went to a nearby inn, sold them, then ate and drank as much as he wished.

In the evening he came home with four oxen. As soon as the priest saw him, he asked:

"Pacala, where are two oxen?"

"I've sold them, father."

"How did it happen?"

"In the morning your wife has probably forgotten to give me some food and how was I to plough hungry the whole day? I took two oxen, sold them and spent the money on food and drinking. But why, maybe you've got angry, father?"

"Oh no, my son. I've simply asked."

Next day the priest changed Pacala's task, and sent him with the sheep flock.

"Take them to the pasture, Pacala, and let them graze properly."

Pacala went with the priest's sheep flock to the pasture and met there some mountain shepherds, who played flutes and bagpipes. He wished to have a bagpipe too.

"How much do you want for a bagpipe?" Pacala asked them.

"Ten sheep and the bagpipe is yours." the mountain shepherds answered.

"Here is the flock! Choose which you like best, only give me a bagpipe to play."

Pacala exchanged ten sheep for a bagpipe, took it and began to play. That was not an ordinary bagpipe as any other, but a bewitched one. When he played it, the sheep began to jump up and dance so, that they even did not touch the ground. And, as Pacala enjoyed playing the bagpipe, he had been doing it all the day long, while the sheep continued to dance as long as he was playing. In the evening the sheep were so hungry, thirsty and overtired, that it was a real pity to look at them. When Pacala came home, the priest was struck with horror.

"What's the matter with these sheep, Pacala?"

"What can it be, father? I've been playing and they've been jumping up all the day long."

"Has anyone seen anything of the kind?"

"Right you are, father. It's really hard to believe it. Today I've got a bewitched bagpipe from some mountain shepherds and it plays so that the valleys resound."

"How did you get it?"

"I let them choose ten sheep for it. But why, maybe you've got angry?"

"Oh no, Pacala, I haden't got angry. The bagpipe suits you perfectly."

The heart of the poor priest was burning with anger. Next day he sent Pacala with the sheep to the pasture, while he himself went another way, hid in some blackthorn bushes and watched him. When Pacala found himself in the open field, he was eager to play. He blew out the bagpipe and began to play. And what happened? One couldn't believe his eyes! The sheep jumped up as if they tried to outstrip each other, while in the blackthorn bushes the priest began to jump up and trample so that the ground was trembling. Noticing the priest, Pacala cheered up and played the bagpipe with more courage, while the priest jumped up as high as he could. The priest danced so much that his surplice tore to rags and tatters. Pacala did not even think to stop playing the bagpipe. He piped and piped unceasingly. The poor priest remained only with the collar of the surplice on.

His legs ached terribly. Seeing that it was not merely a joke, the priest began to wave his hands to stop Pacala playing, but in vain. Pacala played and played the bagpipe till sunset.

When the priest saw himself free, he ran home as if Old Scratch was chasing him.

He was in such a poor state with his beard pulled out, that he entered the house and fell down on the floor.

"Dear wife, this farm-hand will bring us to an end."

"But what has he done to you? Has he beaten you, has he thrown you down to the ground?"

"He played the bagpipe all the day long and I almost breathed my last breath dancing."

"Woe you! What has come over you to dance in the field?" the wife asked him.

"Pacala has a bewitched bagpipe and when he plays, it raises you up in the air."

"You have probably sank in your second childhood or maybe the werwolves have turned your brain, that you danced alone in the field," she said.

Well, who could believe that it was a bewitched bagpipe?! Sometimes the man sees and does not believe, but when he does not see?

The priest took it to heart, and thought that in the evening, when Pacala returned with the flock from the pasture, he would call him to play the bagpipe so that his wife could see it for herself.

He did as he had thought. In the evening he invited Pacala into the house, and asked him to take the bagpipe and play a little.

"I have played enough today, father."

"Please, play just a little more!"

Seeing that he was asked so insistently, Pacala went to bring the bagpipe and do as the priest wanted him.

The priest, being afraid to dance again as he alreary had, tied two millstones to his legs, while his wife climbed up into the garret to take down a beehive. Shortly after that Pacala came with his bagpipe, blew it properly out, and, when he started playing it, the place became bewitched. The priest began to raise the millstones, jump up and turn round, while his wife danced in the garret as if she was mad with joy. There was no escape from Pacala's playing, as it tickled the heart and bewitched so that one was torn to pieces. Well, when the time came for Pacala to leave the bagpipe, he still played and played. He piped until the priest's wife was dizzy and fell from the garret together with the beehive. When the priest saw that she was ready to give up her soue he began to cry:

"It's enough, Pacala!"

But Pacala pretended even not to hear.

"It's enough, you accursed rascal."

"But why, maybe you've got angry, father?"
"Oh no, not a bit of it!"
After Pacala left, the priest untied the millstones from his legs, took his head in hands and thought how to get rid of the farm-hand. He thought and thought and then decided to give Pacala such a work, which he would not be able to fulfil and then to chase him away. At that very moment he called the farm-hand and said the following:
"Pacala, long ago I wanted to make a walk from the threshold of the house to the gate, as it is difficult to pass, when it is muddy, but I did not succeed in it. I want you to make it to my liking. When I step with one leg, it must be hard, and when I step with the other, it must be soft."
"All right, father! I'll make it."
At night, when the priest fell asleep and the people in the village quietened, Pacala took an axe and began to cut of the heads and legs of the sheep, then he put one of them with the back up and another with the back down, so that while stepping with one foot it was hard and with the other it was soft. After that he closed the sheep up with earth, so that the priest could not see what the walk was made of.
In the morning the priest got up and asked Pacala:
"Have you made the walk, Pacala?
"I have, father, I have!"
The priest got down from the verandah and, when he started to step along the walk, once it was hard and once it was soft.
"That's well done, my farm-hand! You are skilled in everything. Bravo, Pacala, bravo! Now take the sheep and drive them to the pasture."
"Father, I haven't where to take them from."
"What's that? Where are the sheep?"
"I have cut them and made the walk with them."
When the priest had a better look, he noticed that one sheep was with the back up and another with the back down.
"You rascal, what have you done with my sheep."
"Well, how was I to make the walk otherwise? Oh, maybe you've got angry, father?"
No Pacala, there isn't anything to get angry for."
Now the priest saw that the circumstances became straitened. What was he to do? He had heard that somewhere at the Violet-Blue Forest the devils had a mill, and whoever went there never returned any more. When this occured to him, he filled twelve sacks with ashes at night, put them into the cart, yoked the oxen and woke Pacala in the dead of night.
"Get up, farm-hand, and go to the devils' mill, as we have no flour in the house."
"I'll go, father."
"Go!" the priest thought in his mind, "I want even your name not to be

heard of." Pacala did not think that the priest put ashes instead of wheat into the sacks. He took the oxen by the rope and went a long way till the Violet-Blue Forest, and there he stopped at the devils' mill.

"Glad to see you, millers!"

"You are welcome, good peasant!"

"Here I have brought twelve sacks with wheat to make flour."

"Go to bed and have a rest. Before you take your forty winks, we shall grind the wheat and put the flour into the cart."

"That's well, millers, I like it," said Pacala and went to bed light-hearted.

An hour or two might have passed and Old Gooseberry sent a devil to untie Pacala's sacks and to pour the wheat into the mill hopper. But instead of wheat there were ashes there. All the devils gathered, while Old Gooseberry passed by Pacala and struck him with the tail on the nose.

"Hey you, what's the matter?" shouted Pacala.

"Get up quicker."

"Is the flour ready?"

"What from? You've brought ashes and want flour?!"

"Take your sacks and off you go! Don't try to carry the joke too far!"

When Pacala saw the ashes, he thought that the devils had played a nasty trick on him.

"Here you Evil ones, I'll show you who Pacala is. You are not millers but thieves. Fill my sacks with flour at once, otherwise you'll be in the jaws of death!"

"If you have thought to joke, you may do it," the devils answered him.

Pacala did not think too much, seized three of them by horns, and smash! put them under a mill stone so that they all became flat cakes. The other devils ran all sides and hid in each hole.

"Wait a little, Pacala knows you very well!" said the farm-hand, and brought a great burden of straw to set the mill on fire.

Seeing that they had got into trouble, the devils came forth with Old Gooseberry ahead and said:

"Stop, good man! We shall fill up twelve sacks with flour, only don't set the mill on fire."

"You have to do it at once!"

The devils looked for good flour in their barns, loaded Pacala's cart, only to get rid of him.

After Pacala had left, the devils gathered to take council among themselves.

"This one has taken us in rather well!" the devils complained.

"Now," Old Gooseberry told them, "you must meet him on his way, break his wheels and the shaft of the cart, and, until he brings another cart, we shall take the flour back."

Capital!

Pacala continued to drive on his cart without any thought of trouble. When he came to a bridge, a devil appeared from under it and hit one of the wheels to break it.

Pacala told him gently:

"You devil, don't break the wheel, otherwise I'll put you instead of it!"

But the devil wouldn't quieten. He went on hitting the wheel and it broke. Then Pacala jumped down from the cart, bound the devil tight and put him instead of the wheel.

The second devil appeared at the next bridge and broke another wheel. Pacala bound him tight as well and put him at the axle.

Some time later the third devil came out from under the third bridge, and began to cut the shaft with an axe. Pacala looked from the cart and said:

"You devil, don't cut the shaft, otherwise I'll put you instead of it,"

But the devil wouldn't listen to him. He went on striking with the axe and broke the shaft. Pacala, in his turn, did not lose his presence of mind. He took the devil quietly by the horns, tied him up to the yoke and he fitted to the cart excellentlly.

Having passed half of the way, Pacala wanted to have a rest. While he was sitting on the roadside, two wolves dashed at the oxen to tear them up.

"Let the oxen alone if you don't want to pull the cart instead of them."

But the wolves didn't pay attention to his words.

"Come, come! Later on you'll say that you have bad luck."

When the wolves ate up the oxen, Pacala caught and yoked them.

"Well! Now be so kind as to pull the cart home, I cannot stay with the sacks half way." Pacala said and urged them with the whip. The wolves pulled so that their paws deepened into the earth.

When it grew dark, Pacala entered the yard. The priest stood dumb-founded of spite. The time being late, he did not even come out of the house. He asked from the doorway:

"Did you grind flour, Pacala?"

"I did, father."

"Then unyoke the oxen, drive them into the stable and go to bed."

Pacala did as the priest ordered him. When the wolves saw the cattle in the stable they killed them all, ate their fill and lay in the manger. At day-break the priest got up to untie the sacks with ashes, to show Pacala what kind of flour he had made, and then to send him away from his house. When he untied the sacks he saw the best flour. Twelve sacks of it! The priest wanted to go round the cart but noticed the devils. Oh, poor me! He was so much afraid, that he did not know what to do.

"Whom has he brought to my house, the accursed?! I think that he has filled my stable with Evil ones."

When he opened the door of the stable, he almost fell to the ground of

fear. All the cattle were torn up, while two wolves were sleeping in the manger.

"Pacala, hey you Pacala!"

"What is it, father?"

"What have you brought to my house?"

"Oh father, if you knew what happened to me at that mill, where you had sent me," answered Pacala, and told him the whole story in detail.

"You have to go away from me. You have left me without cattle, without cart, you have filled my house with devils!"

"No father, I have to serve you till the cuckoo sings. Well, maybe you've got angry?"

"No Pacala, what to get angry for?"

"I've simply thought about it, father."

The priest saw that Pacala carried the joke too far. He called his wife and his mother-in-law to put heads together how to get rid of Pacala.

"We shall do as follows," said the mother-in-law, "tomorrow at dawn I shall climb up the tree from the gate and begin to sing cuckoo, while you wake him up and tell him to leave as his term is up."

Next day at the break of day the priest's mother-in-law climbed up the tree and began to sing "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

The priest came out of doors and cried:

"Get up, Pacala, and go away, your term is up."

"The term is not up yet, father."

"Why, just listen how the cuckoo is singing."

"Where is it, father?"

"Look there, it's in the tree at the gate."

"I don't quite believe it. I'd like to see how it flies," Pacala said, throwing a stone at the tree. He struck the old woman and killed her.

"You villain, devil's dam!.."

"Maybe you've got angry, father?"

"No, I haven't, Pacala. What should I get angry for?" said the priest.

Being afraid of something worse, the priest took council with his wife and decided to take what they had of greater value and run away from their house. But Pacala was not easy to deceive. He found out what was planned and, in secret, got at the bottom of the sack, the priest had prepared.

In the dead of night the priest put the sack on his shoulder, took his wife by the hand and set off. He walked and walked, proceeded over a hill, then over another and came to a river. Being near the water, the priest took off his clothes, lifted the sack higher, and started forward with God in mind.

At the middle of the river the sack dipped a little into the water. Pacala, feeling the moisture, cried from there:

"Higher, father, otherwise the Gospel will get wet.

The priest pricked up his ears.

"Have you heard anything, dear?" he asked his wife.
"It seemed to me that somebody was speaking."
The priest's hands became stiff and again let the sack slip.
Pacala again spoke from the inside:
"Higher, father, otherwise the Gospel will get wet."
"Here! Have you heard?"
"Our sacred Gospel!"
"It is afraid of water, and it says so."
The priest untied the sack on the opposite bank to look for the Gospel, when lo! Pacala came out.
"Damn! Even here I couldn't get rid of you!"
"Maybe you've got angry, father?"
"No Pacala, I haven't but I wonder how you have got here."
"Well, how could I remain at home and not carry out my service."
Being tired of travelling, they all three lay on the bank of the river. Pacala lay close to the water, the priest's wife in the middle and the priest himself a little further. The priest drew nearer to his wife and slowly whispered to her:
"When Pacala is dead asleep, let's push him into the water to get rid of him once and for ever."
Pacala had his shortcomings, but he heard well. Finding out their plan, he allowed the priest and his wife to be in a deep sleep, then changed places with her and jabbed the priest in the rib.
"Now, farher!"
The priest sprang up, seized his wife and threw her just into the middle of the river.
"Now I think that we have got rid of him," said the priest and again lay to sleep.
When it was daylight, the priest got up and he saw Pacala by him, instead of his wife.
"Where is my wife?"
"Whom did you throw into the water last night?"
"You cursed villain! You have left me without wife."
"But why, maybe you've got angry, farther?"
"Who wouldn't? You have wasted my wealth, you have filled my house with devils, you have killed my mother-in-law, you have drowned my wife, you are but the devil's dam!..."
"If that's how the matter stands, father, then stop," said Pacala, and took a knife out of his pocket. "I don't think that you have forgotten what our agreement was," and snap!— he cut off the priest's nose and an ear.
Full of anger and sorrow, the priest went into the wide world and gone he was for ever. The farm-hand returned to the village and began to live in the priest's house.

PACALA AND TYNDALA

eople say that Pacala and Tyndala were men as any men with their own houses, with own orchards and vineyards. It was true that they were not of noble origin, but were sly and fond of playing tricks as nobody else.

One day Pacala filled a sack with maize stumps, put some crumbled bread above and went to the market to sell them in a lump.

Tyndala also took a sack, filled it with peaces of charcoal, as they were not heavy, put prunes above them and also went to the market. While going, they met each other on the road.

"How do you do, chum!"

"How do you do!"

"Where are you going?"

"To the market."

"And what have you for sale?"

"Well, some crumbled bread. And what about you? What are you carrying in your sack?"

"Prunes."

"Oh, it's just what I need. Let me taste them."

Tyndala gave Pacala a handful of prunes to get a taste of them, while Pacala gave Tyndala some crumbled bread. One of them liked the crumbled bread, the other — the prunes. Pacala, thinking that it was possible to gain, said:

"Let's exchange! It was just for prunes that I was going to the market. I'll give you the sack with crumbled bread and you'll give me the prunes."

"It suits me perfectly, as I was going to the market with the prunes to buy some bread."

They exchanged the sacks and went off as quickly as they could, each of them thinking that he had taken in the other one.

When both of them came home and untied the sacks, their joy changed into sorrow. They understood that they had cheated each other and laughed. Shortly after that, they met, shook hands and said:

"Let's be sworn brothers and look for some service, because with our taking in we've got into a tight spot."

They set out and after some time came to a village, knocked at a gate and got at a priest.

"How do you do, father! Aren't you in need of farm-hands?"

"Well, you have come just in time, good men, as I am in need of some."

Thus they came to an agreement, and both of them became employed

by the priest. Next day the priest gave work to each of them. He sent Pacala to drive the cow to the pasture and Tyndala to clean the stable. When Pacala came to the periphery of the village the cow stampeded and began to run so that in the evening poor Pacala came home legless of running.

Tyndala did not find himself in a better position, as he had to clean the manure from the stable. When he threw a pitchfork of manure, the priest struck him once with the walking stick to hurry him up. He worked all the day long without any food or rest.

In the evening the two farm-hands met and Pacala asked Tyndala:

"Well, how have you been today?"

Tyndala, with the idea of taking him in, answered:

"All right, my brother! It has been so well that it could never be better. Whenever I threw a pitchfork of manure, the priest gave me a glass of wine and some communion bread."

Pacala envied Tyndala that he had drunk and eaten all the day, while he had to run all over the fields. Then he said:

"You know, Tyndala, to tell you the truth, I haven't been worse. I have lain in the green grass all day long and have eaten hazel-nuts. It was a pity that I djdn't know to take a mortar with me as there were many hazel-nuts, and it was difficult to crack them in my hand."

Tyndala was astonished at such a luck Pacala had had and proposed:

"Let us exchange places!"

"Let's!"

Next day Tyndala went with the cow and Pacala remained at home, as they had agreed.

Tyndala believed Pacala and took a pillow and a mortar to sleep and to eat hazel-nuts. When he came to the common grazing ground the priest's cow began to run from one hill to another, so that poor Tyndala couldn't feel his legs. Besides, he had to carry the priest's mortar and a pillow a whole summer day.

Pacala began his work at home. Whenever he raised the pitchfork, the priest crack! struck him with the walking stick.

They finished that day with moil and toil and in the evening met again. Seeing that they were at the mercy of the priest, both of them said:

"Let the priest and all his relatives be accursed, as he is such a nice fellow indeed!"

And, having no desire to suffer such a doom, they put heads together and decided to run away.

When it grew dark, the cow lay on the cellar. The priest's wife saw it and told her husband:

"Go and drive the cow away from there, as the cellar may tumble down over our money.

Pacala and Tyndala were sitting out on the veranda and heard where the priest kept his money.

The priest drove the cow into the enclosure, and went to bed.

Pacala and Tyndala looked for two good bags, and after midnight, when even the stones were sleeping, got up and went to the cellar.

Pacala thought, on the one hand, how to take in Tyndala, and, on the other, how to take hold of the money as simply as possible, so he said:

"Do you know what I think, you go into the cellar first, Tyndala, as you are taller. You fill the bags with money, I shall pull them out and then you give me your hand and I shall draw you out of the cellar as well.

Tyndala got into the cellar, filled one bag with money, while he got himself into the second one. He thought that Pacala could diddle him, take the bags with money and leave him there in the cellar without anybody to draw him out. Thinking that in such a way it would be better, he cried:

"Pull the bags, Pacala, I've filled them!"

Pacala pulled the bags out, put them on the shoulder, but he did not hold out his hand to draw Tyndala. Then he went out of the priest's yard and, walking slowly, he came to the field. There he stopped to have a short rest, as the load was very heavy, but he soon fell asleep.

It was just what Tyndala was waiting for. He got out of the bag, took both the bags and ran away. He walked and walked until he got tired and decided to stop for a rest.

"But I shall not stop near the road to get asleep. Pacala could come and take the bags," he thought.

Tyndala walked far from the road and lay in a maize field.

When Pacala awoke he saw that the bags had disappeared. What a misfortune! Then he thought:

"The one who has taken the bags, hasn't gone very far away, as the money is heavy. Maybe he is waiting somewhere for a cart."

Pacala set out and walked for some time, then he began to strike with the whip as if he urged the yoked oxen.

"Gee hoy! Ho hoa!"

Tyndala heard and thought that it was a cart with a pair of oxen. He hurried to come before it to ask for a lift, but he saw Pacala there, who took him by the chest and cried:

"Up till here you have walked, but now sit down to divide the money."

Tyndala did not object. He put the bag on the ground and they began the division: one ducat to one of them and one ducat to the other. At the end a ducat remained without pair.

Both Pacala wanted to take it, and Tyndala did not want to leave it. At last they decided to do in such a way: one of them had to keep and use it for a year, then the other one to do the same for another year, and so

each of them in turn.

Pacala was the first who took it, and kept it for a year. When the term was out, he told his wife:

"Tomorrow or on the day after tomorrow Tyndala will come for the ducat, but I don't want to give it to him, as I feel all right with it in case of need. I'll go and hide in the earth hut. If Tyndala comes, tell him that Pacala died some two or three days before and he had been buried."

Pacala hid in the earth hut and soon after that Tyndala came and knocked at the door.

"Come out Pacala and bring me the ducat, as the year has passed. And don't even think to keep it, because I need it badly to cover my expenses."

Pacala's wife came out, stopped on the threshold and said:

"Pacala died. May he rest in peace! Two or three days have passed since I buried him. Look, his grave is there in the earth hut."

Then she began to weep and lament so that Tyndala would not suspect anything. When Tyndala heard her lamenting, his heart filled with grief. He was not such a callous man and decided to go and see even the grave.

"I'll go to say good-bye to him as it is proper to a good man."

Tyndala started to go toward the earth hut, and, coming there, he went around it.

Pacala thought that the calf was walking above the hut and cried:

"Hoy, you crock!"

Tyndala recognized his voice.

"Here you are lost to all sense of shame! Come out and give me the ducat!"

Pacala came out and gave him the ducat to keep it for a year, as they had agreed.

Tyndala took the ducat and kept it for a year. When the term drew near, he would not have liked to give it back. He took councel with the priest, with the neighbours to pretend that he was dead and to be buried according to the custom.

Pacala came and found him dead. The people were sitting around him with tears in their eyes. His wife was lamenting and groaning, that it was a deep woe to look at her.

They said prayers for him and took him to church. As it was at nightfall, the priest said:

"Let us leave him here till tomorrow."

Nobody surpassed Pacala in his slyness. How could he surrender this time? It was impossible! Everybody went out, while he remained in. He hid in the altar and began to watch.

At midnight twelve thieves entered, sat down in the middle of the church and began to divide their money. At the end a ducat remained without

pair. One of the oldest thieves said:

"The one who will cut off this dead person's head with a single sword strike will keep the ducat."

One of the youngest thieves said:

"I'll do it!"

When he raised the sword to cut off Tyndala's head, the latter cried:

"Leap, you all the dead people, as the alive ones are killing us!"

Seeing that the dead person rose, the thieves were dreadfully frightened, left the money and ran away, banging the door.

Then Pacala came out of the altar:

"That's how the matter stands! This time you won't get rid of me, until you give me the ducat to use it for a year."

But then they saw the ducats in the middle of the church and began to divide them.

Nobody knows how long the thieves had run, but they stopped and decided to come back and see how many dead people were there in the church and to take their money back.

They came to the church, and one thief thrust his head through the window and looked in.

Pacala and Tyndala were dividing the money and said all the time:

"Here is a ducat for you, here is a ducat for me..."

At the end of the division a ducat remained without pair.

Tyndala looked around, and seeing the cap in the window, said:

"Here, take this cap instead of a ducat!"

The thief got frightened and told others:

"There are so many dead people in the church, that not each of them has got a ducat, and they have taken my cap, as one has remained without a coin. Let us run away, otherwise they'll come after us and we shall not be able to face them."

The thieves ran away.

Pacala and Tyndala came out in high spirits and started one to the east and the other to the west with the intention to act in the same way, if they ever met again.

HE WHO THINKS PIE WILL FALL FROM THE SKY WON'T RISE VERY HIGH

Once upon a time there lived a very lazy man. He was so lazy that the ground underneath him grew mouldy. He waited for pie to fall from the sky, and even then wanted someone else to chew it for him. When a man is lazy poverty overtakes him. When he ran out of everything, he decided to go to the Goddess of Good Luck to ask her to change his fate: not to work, but to have only one working day per week, and wedding parties on that day.

So the lazy man took a bag and a stick and went to seek his fortune. On his way through a forest he came across a wolf. The poor beast was very thin, and miserable-looking, and had no hair.

"Where are you going, my good man?" asked the wolf.

"To the Goddess of Good Luck to give me good fortune, and to tell me how to live happily in this world."

"If you go to the Goddess of Good Luck, ask her what I could do, so that my hair should grow, because I had no hair when I was born."

"Very well! I'll ask her!" said the lazy-bones, and walked on further. Soon he saw a vine, with its leaves all yellow and withered.

"Where are you going, my good man?" asked the vine in a human voice.

"To the Goddess of Good Luck."

"But why?"

"To ask her for another fate, to give me the good fortune, not to work, but to live like lords, not worrying about tomorrow, and to have as much food as I like."

"If you meet her, ask her what am I to do so that my leaves should grow green again."

"Very well, I'll ask her," said he, and went on further.

Soon he reached a river and an enormous fish with a carbuncle bigger than itself emerged from the water, and made signs for him to come closer:

"Come nearer, my good man."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the Goddess of Good Luck."

"What for?"

"To find good fortune, and to learn how to live happily in the future."

"If you meet her, ask her what I can do to get rid of this carbuncle, which is growing bigger and bigger."

"Very well, I'll ask her."

Further on in a forest, he found a spring, and near it there was an

extremely beautiful girl, in a white dress and a crown of flowers round her head.

"Who are you, my good man?"

"A poor traveller."

"Where are you going?"

"To the Goddess of Good Luck."

"Did you have a long journey before you met me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What have you seen on your way?"

"I have seen a wolf with no hair."

"What did he say to you?"

"When he found out where I was going, he told me to ask you what to do to make his hair grow."

"Tell him to eat the heart of a lazy and stupid man. And what else have you seen?"

"A vine with yellow and withered leaves, and it wanted to know what to do so that its leaves would grow green and not wither."

"Tell it that long ago someone buried a jug full of gold coins under its roots and if somebody else digs it out of there, then it will grow green leaves and have big bunches of grapes."

"Wery well, I shall remember."

"What else have you seen?"

"An enormous fish with a big carbuncle, which grows bigger each day, and it wanted to know how to get rid of it."

"The fish's carbuncle is full of diamonds. Someone should cut the carbuncle open, and help the fish to get well again."

"Very well, I'll tell the fish."

"Now you must return."

"But why? I'm on my way to find my fortune?"

"Go back on the way you have come. You'll find your fortune on the way, and if you have a good head on your shoulders, you'll be a rich man and live happily, if not it will be your own fault."

So the lazy man went back. After a long way he came to the fish, which asked:

"What did the Goddess of Good Luck say?"

"She said that your carbuncle is full of diamonds and you'll get rid of the trouble if you find somebody to cut it open."

The fish asked him:

"Would you be so king as to cut my carbuncle open, and take the diamonds as a reward?"

"No, I have no time," said the lazy-bones. "I must go, because good fortune is waiting for me, and I'll have everything I need."

Laziness is more powerful than poverty, so they say. So he went on

his way and soon he came to the vine, which stopped him and asked:

"Good man, have you been to the Goddess of Good Luck?"

"Yes, I have."

"What did she tell you?"

"She said that you have a jug full of gold buried under your roots, and it prevents them from spreading, and that's why you can't grow green leaves and ripe grapes."

"If that is so, would you be so kind as to dig up the jug? It would help me, and you could keep the gold yourself."

"Oh, no! Why should I dig and tire myself out? I'd better be on my way, because my good fortune is waiting for me, and I'll have everything I need without any work."

The traveller went on until he met the wolf.

"Have you asked the Goddess of Good Luck about me?"

"Of course I have."

"What should I do to make my hair grow?"

"You must eat the heart of a lazy and stupid man."

"What else have you seen and heard? Where else have you been?"

"I saw a withered vine. Someone has buried a jug of gold at its roots, and that hampers its growing. It asked me to dig the jug out and keep the gold, but I knew that good fortune was waiting for me on my way, and that I'd have everything I need, so why should I work?"

"What else have you seen?"

"I saw an enormous fish with a big carbuncle full of diamonds. The fish asked me to cut open the carbuncle, and take the diamonds and get it out of trouble, but I was in a hurry to meet my good fortune and went on my way."

The wolf thought and thought and at last decided:

"If the upper hand laziness gains, then that man hasn't got much brains. I've never met other man as lazy and stupid as you are. You didn't dig out the pot of money, you didn't want to cut the fish's carbuncle open to get the diamonds, although with all those riches you could have lived in luxury all your life."

Saying this the wolf leapt upon the lazy man, tore out his heart, and devoured it.

Since then people say that he who thinks pie will fall from the sky, won't rise very high.

THE CARELESS LANDLORD

Once there lived an extremely rich landlord. He possessed much land, many forests, and large mansions. Many people bent their backs working for him. Peasants ploughed his land, shepherds took care of his sheep, and herdsmen watched his cattle. All he had to do was to enjoy life. When he saw that kings had to go to wars, officials had to go collecting taxes, judges had to conduct trials, priests and monks had to go to church to pray, he became even more swollen-headed. One day he wrote on his gate: "Carefree landlord."

Shortly after that the King passed by with his army, read the inscription, summoned the landlord and asked him:

"What is your name, sir?"

"My name, your Majesty, is no concern of yours."

"Why not?"

"Because your Majesty, you have great troubles in gathering the army, and waging wars, while I have no troubles, and no responsibilities, and don't want any."

The King was a very envious person. He thought: "Why? Am I not the King here? I will make this landlord know just what trouble and care are." He told the landlord:

"You haven't known any troubles and cares up till now, but from now on you'll know them well enough. In three days you must come to my palace and answer these four questions: how many guests did I have at my wedding party; what is the distance between the earth and the sky; what is the distance from one end of the earth to the other one; and what am I thinking about? If in three days you do not come to the palace with the right answers you will have your head chopped off."

That did indeed cause the landlord a lot of troubles and care. He didn't know what to do, and he had nobody to advise him. Three days passed, and he ordered the coachman to get the coach ready. When the landlord got into it the coachman asked him:

"Where to go, my lord?"
"To the King, to have my head chopped off."
"What ever for my lord?"
"Because I cannot answer his four questions," and he told the coachman the whole story about the King's orders.
The coachman listened to him, and then said:
"Let's change clothes, my lord. Get up on my driving seat, and I'll go to the King in your place. If he likes my answers your rich clothes will be mine, but if he doesn't, I'll have my head chopped off, while you can return to your house."
The landlord happily changed clothes and places with the coachman. He dressed himself in the landlord's clothes, went straight to the palace, and bowed in front of the King, who looked at him and asked:
"Well, how many guests were there at my wedding party?"
The coachman answered:
"Your Majesty, at your wedding party there were more people than hairs on your head."
The King laughed, and asked him the second question:
"What is the distance from the earth to the sky?"
"Not far, your Majesty. When it rains in the sky one can hear it from the earth."
The King liked that answer too.
"Tell me now, what is the distance between the two ends of the earth?"
"Not far, your Majesty, because the sun rises in the morning at one end and sets in the evening at the other."
"Now tell me, what am I thinking about?"
The coachman answered that question as well.
"Your Majesty is thinking: Here's a clever landlord who knows how to answer!"
"That's exactly right!" said the King in amazement.
The coachman told him:
"But you are wrong, your Majesty. You think that you are speaking with the rich landlord, but you are really speaking with his coachman."
"If that's true," said the King, "from now on you'll be landlord, and the landlord will be your coachman."
The coachman returned to the landlord's house and began a happy prosperous life, because he knew what common-sense, care and hard work meant.

THE TRIAL

ong ago there lived a poor man who had neither a cart nor a horse. In sprring he had nothing with which to plough his land to plant potatoes. One Saturday he went to the local priest and asked for the loan of a horse and a plough. The priest was a spiteful and greedy man but still he loaned him a plough, and a mare with a foal. The poor man ploughed till late in the afternoon and then stopped to have a rest. He set the mare free in a a meadow to graze and then he fell asleep. When he woke up the mare had vanished.

"Where on earth is that priest's mare? The foal is here, but the mare is nowhere to be seen."

He searched high and low, and at last in a thicket, he found its horse-shoes. The poor fellow understood that the wolves had had a good dinner there.

There was nothing else to do, so in the evening he returned home, led the foal on a halter, and carried the plough on his back.

Next morning he went to the priest who was just going to start the service. When he saw the peasant he asked:

"Where is my mare?"

"The wolves have devoured it," said the miserable peasant.

The priest replied in a fury:

"I don't care how it happened! You'll have to bring the mare back! She cost me a lot of money."

"But it was not my fault," the peasant argued.

The priest flew at him and seized him by the scruff of the neck:

"I'll take you to the judge."

But first he had to perform the divine service. He locked the poor man in the belfrry, so that he would not escape.

There the poor man thought:

"I haven't a penny in the world to pay him for the mare and I'll be put in jail, and beaten. I'd be better off in the grave. I'll jump from the bel-fry. If I break my neck, it's all the same to me."

So he made sure that nobody was looking and jumped. By a stroke of misfortune he fell on the back of the sexton and dislocated the fellow's hip. Now the sexton grabbed the poor man, and threatened to sue him for damages.

After the divine service the three of them got on a carriage and started off for the courtroom. On their way they passed through a swamp. The

road was narrow, and there was room for only one carriage, but from the opposite direction a rich landlord's coach was coming. The landlord wouldn't give way to the priest's carriage because he was a rich landlord. Neither would the priest give way, because after all he was a servant of God, and besides that, he had the injured sexton with him. After some argument the landlord decided to drive on one side, and free the way, but alas! his horse sank into the swamp.

The rich landlord at once asked them to help him save the horse. But who would save it? The landlord was a landlord, the priest was a priest, the sexton was injured. So it was left to the poor man to pull the horse out of the swamp. He managed to pull the horse out at last, but broke its tail in doing so, and remained with the tail in his hand.

When the landlord saw his horse without a tail he ground his teeth in fury.

"You have ruined my fine horse. I'll sue you for damages."

The landlord was not joking either. He turned round his coach and joined them on their way to the judge. Soon they arrived at the court and the priest, the sexton and the rich landlord, all made statements accusing the poor man. The poor man seeing the danger, asked himself what he should do. He put a good hefty stone inside his shirt, and thought:

"If the judge does me an injustice I'll give him a good one on the noddle-box with the stone to remember me by. I don't care what happens then, if I know that I deserve it."

Everybody entered the court. The stone protruded under the poor man's shirt, and he tried to conceal it as best as he could with his hand. The judge immediately thought that he had a purse of gold coins in his bosom, and winked at the poor man, giving him to understand that he would do his best to save him from punishment.

The court procedure started. The priest was summoned first. The judge ordered him:

"Tell the court what happened."

The priest told the whole story, how he had loaned the poor man his mare and its foal, and how the mare had been eaten by wolves, leaving only the foal.

"Now I demand that he either finds the mare, or pays for it."

The judge then questioned the accused, who answered:

"That's quite right, your Honour, the priest loaned me his mare, but did not take it back in time to prevent it from being eaten by the wolves. I certainly did not want to cause him any loss or damage, and I now ask the priest to forgive me and let me off without payment."

The poor man clutched the stone again to stop it slipping out. The judge noticed that, and at once decided:

"According to the law, the priest must hand over the foal to the poor man for him to bring it up, and when it becomes a mare and has a foal, the poor man must give them back."

The priest thought that it would be better for him to bring up the foal, because before it reached the age of the lost mare it would do a lot of valuable work. So he went out of the court when that case was over and gave the poor man some money not to take the foal and to be reconciled.

After that the judge summoned the sexton.

"What is your complaint?"

"This peasant here jumped down from the belfry and dislocated my hip, your Honour," and he told the court the whole story.

The judge asked the accused:

"And did you jump from the belfry?"

The poor man answered:

"The priest locked me in the belfry so that I should not escape, and went in to conduct the service. I thought I'd rather risk it, and jump down, than be punished for something that was not my fault. It was all the same to me. I just closed my eyes and jumped. It so happened that accidently I struck the sexton in the back. I certainly didn't want to dislocate his hip, and I ask him to pardon me."

The judge saw the man clutching his breast again and replied:

"The law says: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Now you must climb up and jump from the belfry and dislocate his hip."

The sexton was scared. How was he to climb up and jump from the belfry? He was already crippled. When the case was over, he went out and gave the peasant some money and they were reconciled.

Now came the landlord's turn.

"You see, your Honour, we met on a narrow road, and they did not want to give way, and when I did, and my horse fell into the swamp, this peasant pulled it out, but broke off its tail."

The judge asked the accused:

"Why did you break the horse's tail?"

The poor man answered:

"The horse got stuck in the swamp, and nobody wanted to get it out. The landlord wouldn't stir a finger, nor get off the coach because of his being a nobleman, the priest didn't want to dirty his hands, because he is a priest, and the sexton could not help because of his injured hip. I pulled the horse out, your Honour, but I broke its tail in doing so, I asked the landlord to pardon me, because I certainly didn't want to break the horse's tail, but he brought me to court."

The judge noticed the peasant again clutching at the stone in his bosom, and told the landlord:

"According to the law you must give the accused your horse to keep and take care of, till the tail grows again."

That decision did not suit the landlord.

"I'd rather keep it myself, your Honour, and use it till the tail grows."

The judge answered:

"This is the law, and the decision of the court. Go on your way, and do not find fault with innocent people for anything."

The landlord went outside when the case was over, and paid the peasant some money not to take the horse, and to recompense him for the trouble he had caused him.

Everybody left the court but the judge called the peasant back, to get his reward.

"Take out what you've got in your bosom, and let me see how much you have there, because I have done you justice."

The poor man took the stone out of his bosom and said:

"This is all I've got, your Honour. If you hadn't done me justice I'd have struck you on the noddle-box with this stone, and given you something to remember me by."

Thus the poor man received proper justice, and that trial is much spoken about even until today.

THE MAGIC BELL

Once upon a time there was a poor boy and he had no parents to take care of him. He became a shepherd in the mountains. That boy had one treasure only — a magic bell which he rang, and when he did so the flock went wherever he wanted. In the evening he usually put the bell up in a tree, so that the wolf should not hear it ringing, and not come to worry the sheep.

One day there was a heavy thunderstorm and the boy came back to the sheepfold, hung the bell up in a tree, and went to sleep.

When he woke up in the morning he found that the tree had grown very tall, so tall he couldn't possibly reach the bell.

"Dear tree, bend yourself, so that I can take my bell, and drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I won't bend my knee," said the tree.

The boy went to an axe and asked it:

"*Come axe, and help me to chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture.*"

"No. My handle is cracked," said the axe.

The boy went to some rust.

"Come, rust, eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I don't feel I must," said the rust.

The boy got angry and went to the fire.

"Come, fire, and burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I'm too tired," said the fire.

Then the boy addressed the water.

"Water, come and put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I don't think I ought to," said the water.

Next the boy went to the ox.

"Oh, come and drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I can't help your flock," said the ox.

The boy got angry and went to the wolf.

"Wolf, come and eat the ox, that won't drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, eat it yourself," said the wolf.

Next he went to the hunter.

"Hunter, come and shoot the wolf, that won't eat the ox, that won't drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, why should I, I wonder?" said the hunter.

Then the boy went to the mouse.

"Mouse, mouse, come and gnaw the rifle-straps of the hunter that won't shoot the wolf, that won't eat the ox, that won't drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I can't leave the house," said the mouse.

Off he went to the cat.

"Come cat, and eat the mouse, that won't gnaw the riflestraps of the hunter, that won't shoot the wolf, that won't eat the ox, that won't drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to

give me my bell, to drive the sheep to the pasture."

"No, I can't do that," said the cat.

What could the boy do? He went to the dog.

"Hey, Shaggy, come along with me and bite the cat, that won't eat the mouse, that won't gnaw the rifle-straps of the hunter, that won't shoot the wolf, that won't eat the ox, that won't drink the water, that won't put out the fire, that won't burn the rust, that won't eat away the axe, that won't chop down the tree, that won't bend to give me my bell, because it is high time for me to drive my hungry and thirsty sheep to the pasture."

The dog took pity on the boy, whom nobody wanted to help. He got up and ran after the cat, the cat was frightened and ran to eat the mouse, the mouse ran off to gnaw the hunter's riflestraps, the hunter ran to take his rifle and shoot the wolf, the wolf ran to eat the ox, the ox ran to the river to drink the water, the water ran over the fire to put it out, the fire ran to burn the rust, the rust ran to the axe to eat it away, the axe ran to chop down the tree, and the tree was so scared, that it bent itself down, and the boy took his bell and drove his sheep to the pasture. When he rang the bell his flock went where he wanted.

From that time on the dog has remained on guard at the sheepfold and has become the shepherd's best friend.

THE OLD HAZEL-NUT TREE

Once there stood an old hazel-nut tree in the forest. In autumn when the hazel-nuts were ripe there came a squirrel and collected all the hazel-nuts, and laid them in a heap near the hazel-nut tree roots. The hazel said: "Dear squirrel, leave at least one hazel-nut, so that a young hazel bush will grow next year."

"I won't leave anything, because winter is coming, with storms and frosts, and what shall I eat then? I'll die of hunger."

The squirrel sat down near her store, gnawing the nuts, and sending the empty shells flying.

The hazel stood gazing,
Its branches were swaying,
Its leaves were a-waving.

Then a fox came out of the forest, and swallowed the squirrel that had gnawel the nuts.

The hazel stood gazing,
Its branches were swaying,
Its leaves were a-waving.

Then a dog rushed out from among the trees and finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

The hazel stood gazing,
Its branches were swaying,
Its leaves were a-waving.

Then a wolf stole up unseen, and devourel the dog, that had finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

The hazel stood gazing,
Its branches were swaying,
Its leaves were a-waving.

As the wolf was lying there with its stomach full, a leopard leapt on it, and wiped out the wolf, that had devoured the dog, that had finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

The hazel stood gazing,
Its branches were swaying,
Its leaves were a-waving.

The Leopard sat down under the tree to sleep. The hazel-nut tree, being very old and rotten, fell and landed on the leopard, that had wiped out the wolf, that had devoured the dog, that had finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

Then came the lightning-fire, and hit the hazel that had landed on the leopard, that had wiped out the wolf, that had devoured the dog, that had finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

Then the rain came pouring down and flattened the fire, that had hit the hazel, that had landed on the leopard, that had wiped out the wolf, that had devoured the dog, that had finished off the fox, that had swallowed the squirrel, that had gnawed the nuts.

The soil was fertilized by the ashes of the fire, and watered by the rain-storm, and in the spring all the hazel-nuts that had remained from the heap sprouted up, and a big hazel-nut bush grew there.

Since then the hazels grow in woods in the form of big bushes with lots of branches joined to one trunk.

THE OLD PLOUGHMAN AND THE COUNCIL LORDS

Once a young King and several lords of the Royal Council were travelling in their carriages about the country. Near a village they saw an old ploughman who was ploughing with two oxen.

The King said:

"Gool luck, old man!"

"Good luck, Your Highness," he said.

"You have got up a bit late, grandad!"

"No, you're wrong there, Your Highness! I got up early, but I quarelled with good luck on my way, and so I got late."

"Is this road we're on a long one, grandad?"

"Now, it's a short one... you can travel as in the middle of the summer."

"Grandad, could you accept some sheep of mine here on your pasture?"

"Why not? Of course, Your Highness, but you'd have to pay me!"

"Very well! I'll send them. Keep well, grandad!"

"Happy journey to you, Your Highness!"

Some of the Council lords did not pay any attention to the old man's answers. Those who listened to them understood nothing. Later on the way the young King asked them:

"Did you understand the old ploughman's answers?"

"No," the landlords answered, "we didn't, Your Highness."

"Well, if you do not explain them by tomorrow morning, you'll be herdsmen, and not lords of the Council."

The lords had run into great difficulties. They tried in different ways, they racked their brains, they scratched their heads, but they couldn't explain the words. As Council lords whom even such a proud country as Moldavia feared, it did not seem befitting to ask the old ploughman to do them a favour and interpret his words, but they had to come to it, all the same! There was nothing to do but to go to the old man and swallow their shame, because they valued their position as lords of the Council.

So the Council lords went to the old man's house.

"Good evening to you, grandad!"

"Thank you kindly, my lords of the Council! What can I do for you!"

"Would you be so kind as to explain to us the conversation you had with the King in the field?"

"I'll tell you, but you have to pay for it."

Each of them gave him a purse of gold coins, and then they asked him:

"There in the field the King said that you had got up a bit late. What was the meaning of that?"

"By that he meant that I should have got married younger, to have sons by this time to do the ploughing. I told him that I had got married young, but I met with bad luck on the way and my sons had died, leaving me alone to do the ploughing."

"Then he asked you whether the way was long?"

"Yes, and I told him that in spring the valley happened to be flooded, one had to take a long roundabout way, but then there were no floods since the weather was dry, and one could travel on the short direct road as in mid-summer."

"And what about the sheep you agreed to feed?"

"Excuse me, but you are the sheep, my noble Council lords. The King has sent you to the pasture, and I've got the money for my wit."

THE EARNED DUCAT

Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman who had a son. The boy grew but, as he was the only child in the family, he was not used to work. Day after day passed and the time came for him to get married. Finding a girl, whom he loved dearly, he came to his father and said:

"Father, I want to marry."

"All right," his father said, "but you must know, if your time to get married has come, you need a ducat."

"What shall I do with it?"

"Throw it into water. If the ducat floats on the surface of the water, then you are fit for marriage, if it goes to the bottom, you'll have to wait."

The lad became alarmed. Where could he find a ducat? He ran to his mother and asked for one. His mother, being kind-hearted, gave him a ducat. After that the lad went straight to the water and threw the coin into the middle of the river at once.

The ducat sank in a twinkle of an eye.

The lad came downcast to his father.

"Well, how are things, my son?"

"The ducat went to the bottom."

"Then you'll have to wait, as you are probably not fit for marriage. The time hasn't come yet."

The lad loved the girl very much and was anxious to get married as quick as possible. He waited and waited, but nobody told him a single word. What was he to do? He went again to his father.

"Father, permit me to marry."
"Well, but have you got a ducat?"
"I shall find one somehow."
And father repeated the same words:
"The ducat must be thrown into the water. If it floats on the surface, you are fit for marriage, if not — then not!"
The lad went to his mother again.
"Mother, give me one more ducat!"
Oh, my son, why do you waste the ducats in wain? You don't know how a ducat is earned! Why do you throw them into water without purpose?"
"Well, mother, maybe this one will not go to the bottom."
Mother gave him one more ducat. The lad went gladly to his father, who was on the bank of the river.
"Come along! Throw it!" father said.
He took the ducat out of his pocket, and threw it, without any care, just into the middle of the river.
The ducat went to the bottom at once.
Father told him the same:
"You are not fit for marriage yet. The ducat did not float on the surface of the water."
The lad became very sad. Some more time passed. He wanted to get married and again came to his mother.
"Mother, give me one more ducat!"
"Oh, I havent got so many ducats as you want. Why do you throw them into water in vain? Go and earn one. Take your beloved girl and go to earn money. When you earn some, you'll throw them into water."
The lad did not dare to go to his father, as he was afraid not to be scolded even worse.
There was nothing to do, but to go to his beloved girl and discuss the matter with her.
"Let's go! Let's go to earn our own ducats! Why am I to ask mother, then father to give me one? It is better to have our own ducats."
They went together and started to work. After some time they earned a ducat, then two, then three and so on...
When they came home, the lad said:
"Father, let me get married."
"Well, but have you got a ducat?"
"I have," the lad answered with reluctance.
"Let's go to the water."
The father told the son on the bank of the river:
"Throw the ducat into water!"
"Father," the son said, "isn't it possible to keep the ducat and not to

throw it into water? I have worked so much with my beloved girl before we earned it!"

Then the old father said:

"Now you are fit to marry, my son! I bless you two to live together. You know already how to earn money. The earned money is never thrown into water."

TWO BROTHERS

nce upon a time there were two brothers. They lived in good agreement and justice. The elder one was married and had two children, while the younger one was a lad. One summer, during the harvest time, they reaped the wheat, transported it to the threshing floor and threshed it together. Then they made two equal heaps of the clean corn. One for each of them. After that the elder brother went home to have dinner, while the younger remained at the threshing floor to watch the corn heaps. The younger brother took some bushels of corn from his heap, poured them on the elder brother's heap, saying to himself:

"He has wife and children and he needs more. I am alone and wherever I go, I am able to find a slice of bread. Let his share of corn be greater."

Some time later the married brother returned to the threshing floor, and the lad went to have dinner. The elder brother looked at the corn heaps and thought:

"Life is easier for me, I have my house, I have wife and children to take care of me. My brother has nobody, he is alone and there is nobody to help him. Let me give him some bushels of corn. Let his share be greater."

So lived the two brothers. The brothers' shares of corn did not diminish, while good agreement and kind-heartedness grew.

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